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Scenes

IN

THE LIFE OF ST. PETER;

SOMETIME

A Fisherman of Galilee,

AFTERWARDS

AN APOSTLE OF CHRIST.

A Course of Lectures.

BY

THE REV. DANIEL WEST.

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PREFACE.

THE Lectures contained in this little volume were delivered by the Author, in the ordinary course of his ministry, to a week-night congregation, and without the most distant reference to publication. And he would not have yielded to the request of his friends to publish them, but that he had reason to believe they had proved interesting and edifying to his hearers; and he hoped they might, by the blessing of God, prove equally so to the readers.

He is fully conscious of their numerous imperfections, and, but for the many miscellaneous duties connected with a laborious ministry, he might, perhaps, be able to render them more worthy of public patronage. At the same time, he trusts that they may not be found so very imperfect as to fail in pleasantly and profitably aiding the meditations of Christian people.

Bespeaking, therefore, the reader's candour, and praying that the divine blessing may accompany this effort for the diffusion of evangelical truth, the following pages are submitted with the kind wishes of

THE AUTHOR.

HACKNEY GROVE,

June, 1854.

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SCENES
IN
THE LIFE OF ST. PETER.

SCENE I.

THE BUSY FISHERMAN HAILED FROM THE SHORE.

“AND Jesus, walking by the Sea of Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers. And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men. And they straightway left their nets, and followed him.”—Matt. iv. 18-20.

IN the series of Lectures upon which we are now entering, it is desirable that we should, as far as possible, dissociate ourselves from the familiar scenery of our own country, and endeavour to realize that of other and sunnier climes; that, for a while, we should transfer our thoughts from the dull, heavy, and fitful atmosphere of our sea-girt and heaven-blest home, to the genial, brilliant, and changeless East. With freshened recollections of sacred story, we must climb the mountain where a Pro-

phet of old, an Apostle, or the Saviour stood. We must traverse this valley, and cross that stream, and sit by the well or the beach where the Redeemer taught. We must mix with the turbaned heads, and the flowing robes, and the sandaled feet. And, thus surrounding ourselves with the associations of Bible lands, we shall be prepared more perfectly to understand and appreciate Bible narrative.

Nor will what we have now suggested be so difficult a task as some might imagine. It may be accomplished without expense, fatigue, or loss of time, by simply taking the benefit of some of the many books of travel published during the last few years. Our general literature has been enriched by most valuable contributions of trustworthy travellers in the East: and the correct, elegant, and graphic descriptions they have given us of the scenes of sacred story, aided by beautiful pictorial illustrations, have made us almost as familiar with Palestine as with our own country. To some of these men we are laid under great obligation. Their accounts have thrown new light upon the sacred page. Force and beauty have been discovered in passages which previously conveyed no definite idea; and the mystery of many a dark similitude has been unfolded by the means of their observation and research. In company with them we may journey, and gaze upon the places round which are gathered our early and holiest associations. We have thus no dangerous voyage to make,—no toils or discomfort of personal travel to endure. Taking advantage, in this way, of the results

of modern travel, we shall be surprised to find how familiar we may become with strange and far-off regions, and with how much deeper interest the Gospel narrative is invested.

When we speak of realizing the scenes of New-Testament history, we would not be understood as referring merely to the places which are mentioned,—their geographical position and natural features,—but also to the habits, manners, pursuits, and education of the individuals whose character and life are being considered. This is, undoubtedly, a matter of great importance in the study of holy Scripture. In very many cases, the right understanding of the text depends upon our being able to do this. It is hardly possible to form a just estimate of the sayings and doings of the persons about whom we are reading, except in so far as we are able for the time to occupy their place, and to surround ourselves with the circumstances which continually influenced them. It were an easy thing to show how the interpretation of many portions of holy Scripture has been affected by home associations in the mind of the interpreter, and how faulty and unfair the estimates of character have been from the same cause. The numerous allusions to natural scenery, to national history, to geographical position, to domestic customs, to the occupations and pursuits of the several classes of the people, to the morals, religion, and literature of the country, can only be understood and appreciated in proportion to our knowledge of such things, not

as they relate to our own country and its inhabitants, but to the lands and the people embraced in Bible narrative.

In the days of our Lord, the Holy Land was divided into the three provinces of Judea, Samaria, and Galilee. This last was situated in the north, and considered by some the most beautiful and fertile part of Palestine. It is bounded by Mount Lebanon on the north, by the river Jordan and the Sea of Galilee on the east, by the Chison on the south, and by the Mediterranean on the west. This province abounds with magnificent scenery, and is described by Josephus in the most glowing terms. It was divided into Upper and Lower Galilee. The former, lying in the north, was inhabited principally by Syrians, Phœnicians, and Arabians, and was therefore called, "Galilee of the Gentiles." The latter, lying partly along the shores of the Lake of Galilee, was very fertile, and contained several important and populous towns; as Tiberias, Chorazin, Bethsaida, Nazareth, Cana, Capernaum, Nain, Cæsarea, and Ptolemais. Within this province our Lord was brought up, and lived till he was thirty years of age; and though, after he commenced his public ministry, he visited other parts, it was here he chiefly resided, and where he wrought many of his wondrous works. Most of his disciples were natives of Galilee, and were recognised as such by their provincial dialect. This dialect is described by Buxtorf as "of a broad and rustic tone, which affected the pronunciation, not only of letters, but of words." When Peter stood by the fire in the hall of the

High Priest's palace, and was accused of being a disciple of Christ, they said, "Surely thou art one of them: for thou art a Galilean, and thy speech agreeth thereto."

It may be observed farther, that Galilee had acquired some political notoriety in the time of Christ. A man named Judas, a native of Gaulan, in Upper Galilee, had stirred up the people to rebellion against the numbering and taxation imposed upon them by Augustus. He pretended that this was a manifest instance of servitude to a foreign power, which all true Israelites were bound to oppose to the utmost. His doctrine was, that all taxation was unlawful, since God alone was their Master and Lord. As usual in such cases, holy Scripture was pressed into the service of this popular doctrine. The passage upon which he mainly relied, was that occurring in Deut. xvii. 15-19: "Thou shalt in any wise set him King over thee, whom the Lord thy God shall choose: one from among thy brethren shalt thou set King over thee: thou mayest not set a stranger over thee, which is not thy brother. But he shall not multiply horses to himself, nor cause the people to return to Egypt, to the end that he should multiply horses.....Neither shall he multiply wives to himself, that his heart turn not away: neither shall he greatly multiply to himself silver and gold." He argued, that it was unlawful for them to be under the government of strangers, or to be numbered and taxed by the Roman authorities. He succeeded in

making a considerable impression upon the popular mind ; and many persons took up arms and engaged in a kind of civil war. This sedition continued for many years, and, indeed, was not terminated till the destruction of Jerusalem. A knowledge of this political fact will help us to understand the tragedy referred to by our Lord in Luke xiii. It would appear that some of these Galileans came up to Jerusalem to worship God at one of the great festivals ; Pilate the Governor barbarously murdered them in the court of the temple, and thus mingled their blood with that of their sacrifices.

This insurrectionary party is also called “the Sect of the Herodians.” They were so called because the kingdom of Herod the Tetrarch included Galilee beyond Jordan, and the neighbouring places about Gaulan, Judas’s country. Some of these disaffected people sought to entrap the Saviour into their seditious views, by asking him whether it was lawful to pay tribute to Cæsar or no. This was the grand question at issue. To be exempted from the taxation and political control of the Roman empire, was the ultimate object of the sect. The Jewish rulers, too, were anxious to find occasion against Christ ; and nothing could answer their purpose better, than to identify him with this political party. A strenuous attempt was therefore made to fasten upon him a charge of taking part in this rebellion. When he was brought before Pilate, some of his accusers falsely swore that they had found him “perverting the nation,”

and "forbidding to give tribute to Cæsar." But they failed to sustain this accusation: they could not identify him with the seditious and turbulent faction which troubled the land. But though they failed in this, we find that the name of "Galilean" was given to Christ and his disciples as a name of reproach; and that, in after years, Julian the Apostate used to call Christ "the Galilean God," and actually passed a law prohibiting the Christians from being called by any other name than "Galileans." He sought to destroy the rising church by heaping reproach upon the persons composing it, and upon the Divine Saviour whom they delighted in and worshipped. In this design, however, Julian signally failed, and found to his cost that there was neither counsel nor might against the Lord. Having invaded the kingdom of Persia, and won many battles, he was at length suddenly attacked by the Persians; and, being eager to repulse the enemy, he hastened to the field of battle without his armour, when he received a mortal wound by a dart, which, through his arm and side, pierced his very liver. Catching in his hand the blood which flowed from his wound, he dashed it up toward heaven, and cried, "O Galilean, thou hast conquered!"

The scene of our present meditations is on the shore of the Lake of Galilee. This beautiful sheet of water is, in fact, only an expansion of the river Jordan, which enters it on the north. Nearly all travellers agree in reporting that the Jordan flows through without mixing

with the waters of the Lake, and that the stream may be distinctly followed by the eye. This water is variously named, "the Sea of Chinnereth," (Num. xxxiv. 11,) "the Sea of Galilee," (Matt. iv. 18,) "the Lake of Genesaret," (Luke v. 1,) and "the Sea of Tiberias." This last name it has received from Tiberias, one of the towns on its western bank. This town was chiefly built by Herod Antipas, and named by him, in honour of the Roman Emperor, Tiberias. "Genesaret" is probably only a corruption of "Chinnereth," which appears to have been the ancient name of the town of Tiberias. It is supposed by some that this name is derived from two words, signifying "the Garden of a Prince," or "a Royal Garden," and may refer to the garden adjoining the palace of Herod at Tiberias. Others derive "Genesaret" from a Hebrew word which signifies "a Harp," the Lake being supposed somewhat to resemble that instrument in shape. Fuller quaintly observes on this etymology, "Sure the high winds sometimes make but bad music (to the ear of mariners), when playing thereupon." Bad music indeed! when the accompaniments were rude waves and a sinking ship, and the appropriate and thrilling chorus was the cry of the poor sailors in jeopardy, "Master, Master, we perish!"

In speaking of this Sea of Galilee, the Talmud says: "'Seven seas,' saith God, 'have I created, and of them all have I chosen none but the Sea of Genesaret.'" The waters are soft and sweet; it has a beautiful pebbly bed,

and the surrounding atmosphere is remarkably salubrious. The shores are described by Josephus as a perfect paradise, producing every luxury under heaven, at all seasons of the year. One of the most recent descriptions is that given by Dr. Olin. He says, "I remained seated upon one of the ancient tombs for half an hour or more, to enjoy the lovely and magnificent prospect which it afforded of the Sea of Galilee, and the region adjacent. It was four or five hundred feet below me; its surface so smooth as to seem covered with oil, and glittering in the beams of a bright and burning sun, though darkened here and there with the moving shadow of a cloud. The entire eastern shore of the lake was visible, with the exception of a small portion at the southern or lower end. I could only conjecture its length and breadth; but it seemed to me that the expanse of water on which my eye rested might be twelve or fourteen miles in length, by six or seven wide. The high, bold shore is a good deal depressed on the north and north-east, where the Jordan enters; and it occasionally declines a little, or is broken through by a narrow valley, in other places; but, with few exceptions, it is every where a mountain steep. Steep as it is, however, it is usually clothed with grass, shrubs, and small trees. In a few places, where the slope is more gentle, it is covered with wheat and ploughed fields, which exhibit the same aspect of dark red, the sure evidence of fertility, which I had remarked in the Plain of Esdraëlon. The mountain bank seems to rise from the

water's edge; but sometimes there is a border of level ground below it, only visible, however, when sown with wheat, or recently ploughed." Dr. E. D. Clarke, speaking of the grandeur of the scenery, says, "The Lake of Genesaret is surrounded by objects well calculated to heighten the solemn impression made by such recollections, and affords one of the most striking prospects in the Holy Land. Speaking of it comparatively, it may be described as longer and finer than our Cumberland and Westmoreland lakes, although perhaps inferior to Loch Lomond. It does not possess the vastness of Lake Geneva, although it much resembles it in certain points of view. In picturesque beauty it comes nearest to Lake Locarno in Italy, although it is destitute of anything similar to the islands by which that majestic piece of water is adorned. It is inferior in magnitude, and in the height of its surrounding mountains, to the Lake Asphaltites."

As already intimated, there were numerous towns and villages situated on the shores of this beautiful lake. Bethsaida, on the western shore, was the native place of Peter. The precise site of this town has not been ascertained, but it appears to have been not far from Capernaum. The waters of Galilee abounded with fish, and gave the means of subsistence and employment to the surrounding population. Peter was a fisherman by trade; and his boats and his nets constituted his worldly wealth. With the toils and perils of this laborious calling he had been familiar from his childhood. Nor is it likely that

he ever dreamed of the place which he was afterwards to fill in the history of the church and the world to the end of time.

It would appear that Andrew, Peter's brother, was one of the disciples of John the Baptist, and that he first introduced Peter to Christ. The introduction was brought about in the following way:—Andrew and another disciple were present on one occasion with John, when the Saviour was walking by, and John said, "Behold the Lamb of God." These two disciples, having heard these words, immediately followed Jesus. "Jesus turned and saw them following, and said unto them, What seek ye? They said unto him, Rabbi, (which is to say, being interpreted, Master,) where dwellest thou? He saith unto them, Come and see. They came and saw where he dwelt, and abode with him that day: for it was about the tenth hour." But, as it would seem, before accepting this invitation to remain for the night with Christ, Andrew set off in quest of his brother Simon. He was so deeply impressed with the character, conversation, and claims of Christ, that he could not be satisfied until his brother Simon had made the acquaintance of this singularly interesting personage, and been brought to share in his views and feelings. Having met with his brother, he said to him, "We have found the Messias, which is, being interpreted, the Christ." This is a fine illustration of the concern we should feel for, and the efforts we should make to promote, the spiritual interests of our

near relations. We cannot prove our love to husband or wife, to father or mother, to son or daughter, to sister or brother, better than by bringing them to Christ. He is the Great Teacher, the Divine Saviour, the Sovereign Lord, the Judge of all. Bring your friends and relatives to him, that they may receive at his hand wisdom and salvation, happiness and heaven. Bring them to him by invitation, prayer, and faith. Andrew brought Simon to Jesus. "And when Jesus beheld him, he said, Thou art Simon, the son of Jona: thou shalt be called Cephas, which is, by interpretation, a stone," or Peter. This occurred at Capernaum, perhaps some twelve months before Peter was called to immediate attendance upon Christ. It is probable that during this period he had several interviews with Christ, and that, before he was hailed from the shore, he had become fully convinced of the truth of the Saviour's claim to be the Messiah. As yet, however, the Redeemer had not entered upon his public ministry, and Peter continues to follow his calling as a fisherman of Galilee.

We can imagine him leaving his humble home in the morning of the day to which the text refers, accompanied by Andrew, his brother. We can see him taking his usual place in the boat, arranging his nets, and preparing for the labours of the day. They put off from the beach,—they bend upon their oars, and gradually the net is dropped as they stretch out on the lake. Are the brothers engaged in conversation? If so, of what, and of whom, do they converse? Or are they silent and meditative?

With what, then, are the thoughts of Peter occupied? Are they with his wife and family on the shore?—are they taken up with the prospects of the day, the weather, and the take of fish?—or are they of him to whom public attention is so largely turning, as the long-expected Messiah? We may very well suppose that the incidents of his several recent interviews with Christ were fresh in his recollection. New light had broken in upon his mind, and strange influences are at work upon his heart. And now that he leaves the din of the shore, and perhaps catches sight of Capernaum, where the Saviour had chosen to dwell, his thoughts would be busy with him. Was he indeed the Christ of God? “Have I seen and conversed with him who is the ‘desire of all nations?’ Have I been familiarly in the company of him of whom Moses and the Prophets wrote and spoke? Have I spent an evening with the Lord’s Anointed, of whose coming enraptured seers have sung in loftiest verse? How happy am I! how greatly favoured!” Happy, indeed, he was, and favoured of God! Kings, and Prophets, and righteous men, had desired to see the day of Christ, but had not seen it,—to hear the things that Peter heard, but they had not been permitted.

The sky above is clear. The lake is calm; and its unrippled surface, like a brilliant and beautiful mirror, reflects the surrounding scenery, or the passing shadow of a fleecy cloud. All around is still; and only the dip of the oar is heard. But, hark! What voice is that?

They are hailed from the shore. They listen; and the words, "Follow me," thrill them with emotion. There is a majesty and power in this singular call from the shore, to which they bow without a moment's hesitation. They cannot mistake the voice. Its tones have become familiar to them; and their hearts respond with strange and delighted feeling.

"Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men," said the voice from the shore. "And they straightway left their nets, and followed him." Their obedience to the singular call thus addressed to them, was prompt and cheerful. They did not think it unreasonable. They were not unprepared for it. They were not indisposed to it. Whatever it might involve, they were content. Whatever might hold them back, or stand in their way, they were resolved. And, without either delay or reluctance, they forsook every thing at the Saviour's bidding, and followed him.

With them the authority of Christ was paramount; his claims upon them were unquestioned: their love to him overpowered every consideration of business, family, and home. For him all was at once and willingly sacrificed: "They straightway left their nets, and followed him."

But we are told that it was little, after all, that Peter left for Christ,—only his boat and his nets. *Only these!* And what had he beside? Can a man leave more than his all? And is the "all" of one man more to him than the "all" of another man is to him? The "all" of

Peter, though including only his boat and his nets, was as much to him as the "all" of Herod, in yonder sumptuous palace. It was on this principle our Lord estimated the comparative value of what was cast into the treasury by rich persons and by the poor widow. She cast in two mites, which make one farthing; and the Redeemer said, "She hath cast in more than they all; for they have cast in of their abundance, but she of her penury hath cast in all her living,"—all that she possessed. God looks at the heart; and the principle and motive determine the quality of the action. When a man sacrifices *his all for Christ*, whether that all be much or little, it matters not,—*the principle of sacrifice* has been perfectly developed.

"Follow me," said the voice from the shore. "Follow me," that is to say, Become my disciples. Place yourselves under my teaching, and learn my doctrine. Identify yourselves with me and my cause. Come and be my immediate personal attendants. "Follow me" to the work which I have come to fulfil. My work is to do the will of Him that sent me. My mission is to teach mankind; to make God known; to bring life and immortality to light; to establish the kingdom of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. I am come to seek and to save that which is lost. My sheep have been scattered without a shepherd. They wander on the mountains, or stray in the wilderness. I go to seek for them. "Follow me;" break away from the ordinary duties of your calling, —from the attractions of home,—from familiar scenes and

loved associations; "follow me" to strange places,—through paths of difficulty,—to toil, to danger, and to death.

Probably, the full import of this call was not then understood by Peter. But we have no reason to suppose, that if it had been, he would have hesitated to obey. There came another time when the same words were addressed to him, and then it was after years of experience of what was implied in following Christ; and not only so, but when the future was unveiled before him,—when he had been informed that to follow Christ would lead him to a violent end,—to the painful and ignominious death of crucifixion. "When thou wast young," said Christ to him, "thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest; but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not. This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God. And when he had spoken this, he saith unto him, Follow me." (John xxi. 18, 19.) Peter did not quail before the vision of a violent death; he did not shrink from the path of duty, though he knew it was to end on a cross.

But what are these words to us? Have we any concern with them? Unquestionably we have. The words, "Follow me," had, indeed, an extent of meaning, when addressed to Peter, which they have not when addressed to us. They nevertheless comprehensively set forth our highest duty, and exhibit our greatest privilege. In fol-

lowing Christ the loftiest style of human excellence is acquired and exemplified. In the various relationships of life which you sustain; in the sphere in which Divine Providence has placed you; within the circle of your home, there are a multitude of duties devolving upon you;—duties which you cannot neglect without wronging others, and sinning against your own soul. You have your worldly calling to attend to; your place in life to occupy; the anxieties of business to sustain: but the one grand and all-comprehending duty is, to follow Christ. Do this, and you will do every thing you ought to do; neglect it, and the very end of your being is unanswered. This duty of following Christ may be fulfilled in the midst of the family,—in the workshop,—in the counting-house,—or on the exchange. To be followers of Christ implies, that you are guided by his truth, influenced by his Spirit, and governed by his laws; and that you are imitating his example, and ever seeking his honour and glory. We have nothing of more moment to address to you: we have nothing better to recommend to you: no higher distinction can be attained by you, than is expressed in these two words, “Follow me.”

Follow Christ, and, although you be utter strangers to education, literature, and science, you will display a wisdom superior to that of the proudest philosopher,—“the wisdom that cometh from above.” Follow Christ, and, although the wealthy, the great, and the noble know you not, or may treat you with scorn, your companions will

be the excellent of the earth, the loved ones of heaven, the sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty. Follow Christ, and, though the path may be narrow and rough, though the journey may be toilsome and difficult, prosecuted amidst opposition and trial, cheer up: it leads you to the land afar off, where you shall behold the King in his beauty. Follow Christ, and, although the path may lead to a prison, he will be with you, sustaining you with his favour, filling you with joy and gladness, so that, like Paul and Silas in the dungeon at Philippi, you will sing praises to God. Follow Christ, and, if in the inscrutable providence of God you should even be led to a violent death, "rejoice and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in the kingdom of heaven." Follow Christ, and whatever the character of the journey, or the time which it may occupy, it will terminate amidst the satisfactions and glories of the heavenly world. "Father, I will that they also whom thou hast given me be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory."

Observe that Peter was hailed from the shore at the very moment when he was busily engaged in the ordinary duties of his humble calling. Nor is this an uncommon course of procedure on the part of God; for we find that some of the most remarkable calls to the divine service were addressed to individuals while actually engaged in their worldly calling. As in the example of Moses, while keeping the flock of Jethro, his father-in-law, by Horeb, he saw the bush burning with fire, and heard the voice of

God, and received his commission to deliver Israel from Egypt. David was called in from the fields where he watched his sheep, to be anointed by the Prophet King of Judah. It was while Elisha was ploughing with twelve yoke of oxen before him, that Elijah came and cast his mantle upon him, and thus called him to the prophetic office. But it is unnecessary to multiply examples. No man need be ashamed of an honest calling. God has hallowed and given dignity to it. Peter the fisherman, and Paul the tent-maker, in short, "the working men" of our Saviour's time, were the parties whom he chose, and whom he delighted to honour. Man was evidently made for active employment, and idleness is a sin against God's manifest design, against the individual's own health, and against society at large, which has a right to require that, in some department or other, every man shall contribute his share in the common toil.

And instead of an industrious application to the duties of our worldly calling interfering with the practice or enjoyment of true religion, it may be an important means of developing that religion in all its truth and blessedness and power, and of bringing a large revenue of glory to God. Genuine piety is never more lovely, more manifestly divine, than when it is seen in the ordinary walks of life, governing the motives, elevating the moral character, and directing the whole course of the man's actions, so that every word and work is brought into agreement with the revealed will of God. When "the

doctrine of God our Saviour" is thus "adorned in all things," religion presents itself to those around in a clear and beautiful light, and they are led to glorify our Father which is in heaven.

Thus living in the spirit and exemplifying the purity and power of the Gospel, the most insignificant actions of life become, in fact, part and parcel of our religion; and it will be easy to understand how, in such a case, individuals are ready prepared for the manifestation of God's gracious presence and favour at any time and in any place. The truth is, that, wherever they may be, they are in the path of God, and, therefore, are not surprised to meet with him. With whatever their hands may be employed, they are still about the Master's work, and can rejoice in his approval. They walk with God, and do not startle when they hear his voice, as though some strange sound had unexpectedly fallen upon their ear. O how often have his saints been gladdened by the uplifting of his countenance upon them, and by the kindlings of his love within, not only in "the place of the holy," where songs of praise and the voice of prayer are heard, but in the street also, the field, the workshop, and the place of business! In all these places they have been constrained to say, "This is the gate of heaven."

The call now addressed to Peter was to *public service*, and not merely to discipleship. "I will make you fishers of men." *I* will employ you in my own service, as preachers of my Gospel; and your business shall be to

save the souls of men. At a subsequent period, they were fully instructed in the duties of this sacred calling. "Go," said Jesus to the twelve, "to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand. Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye have received, freely give." (Matt. x. 6-8.)

So far as this was a call to the apostleship, it was doubtless peculiar to the twelve. They were to be the infallible teachers of his doctrine, the witnesses of his resurrection, the founders of his church. The Apostles, as Apostles, have had no successors. Their office was peculiar; their work was extraordinary; and their endowments were preternatural and divine. But in carrying on that work which they were divinely called to commence, a succession of men have been raised up in the providence of God, and qualified to preach the Gospel, which is "the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth." Between preachers of the Gospel and the Apostles of Christ, there are things in common which we must not overlook. Divine call and divine qualification are equally essential in the one case as in the other. "No man taketh *this* honour unto himself, but he that is called of God." A man-made ministry is not the ministry of Christ. He will not yield his prerogative to any authority or power whatsoever. A man may be instructed as at the feet of Gamaliel, trained at the University, and be accomplished as a scholar; but all the Doctors and Uni-

versities in Christendom cannot make him a Minister. That is Christ's work. He gives to the church Pastors and teachers. We do not in the least degree undervalue the advantages of a liberal education; but they are no substitute for a call from God. Secure these by all means; but let the man who possesses them be also able to say, that he is "inwardly moved by the Holy Ghost to take upon him this office and work of the ministry."

And let it be further observed, that this call was addressed to one who was already a disciple of Christ, whose heart was already touched by divine grace. There is a moral and religious qualification essential to Christian service. The unconverted are not called to be Ministers of Christ. "Unto the wicked God hath said, What hast thou to do to declare my statutes?" When the blind attempt to lead the blind, the probability is, that both will fall into the ditch. No heavier calamity can befall a church than to have placed over it an unconverted ministry. It is frightful to contemplate the consequences which have resulted from regarding the Christian ministry as a mere profession. For the sake of "filthy lucre," and of placing them in a respectable position in society, worldly and unsanctified men have been obtruded into the holy office; and the consequences have been, that the preaching of the word has become powerless, and the ordinances of the sanctuary barren. "The form of godliness" may have been maintained, but "the power" has been unknown.

The teaching and grace of God are essential to constitute a fitness for the office and work of the holy ministry. Only those who are thus divinely *fitted*, are divinely *called*. "And miserable are those who do not wait for this call; who presume to take the name of 'fishers of men,' and know not how to cast the net of the Divine word, because not brought to an acquaintance with the saving power of the God who bought them. Such persons, having only their *secular* interest in view, study not to catch men, but to catch money: and though, for charity's sake, it may be said of a Pastor of this spirit, he does not enter the sheepfold as a *thief*, yet he certainly lives as a *hireling*."

"Some teach to work, but have no *hands* to row;

Some will be *eyes*, but have no *light* to see;

Some will be *guides*, but have no *feet* to go;

Some *Deaf*, yet *Ears*, some *Dumb*, yet *Tongues* will be:

Dumb, Deaf, Lame, Blind, and Maim'd, yet *Fishers* all!

Fit for no use but store an *Hospital*."

The call we are now considering was addressed to fishermen of Galilee. Men of this class were to be the associates of Christ,—to be co-adjutors with him in the establishment and administration of his spiritual kingdom. He chose "the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; the weak things of the world to confound the mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: that no flesh should glory in his presence." (1 Cor. i. 27-29.)

This is a contrary course to what we might have expected him to pursue. "We might have supposed that he would look to men of influence, authority, and weight ; that, being himself destitute of all the advantages of rank, power, wealth, and learning, he would endeavour to compensate for those defects in his own person by the contrary qualities of his associates, by connecting himself with some of the most powerful, most opulent, most learned, and most eloquent men of his time.

"And this most undoubtedly would have been the mode of proceeding, had the object been to establish his religion by mere *human* means, by influence or by force, by the charms of eloquence, by the powers of reason, by the example, by the authority, by the fashion of the great. But these were not the instruments which Christ meant to make use of. He meant to show that he was above them all ; that he had far other resources, far different auxiliaries, to call in to his support, in comparison with which all the wealth, and magnificence, and power, and wisdom of the world, were trivial and contemptible things. We find, therefore, that not the wise, not the mighty, not the noble, were called to co-operate with him ; but men of the meanest birth, of the lowest occupations, of the humblest talents, and most uncultivated minds. These were the men whom he selected for his companions and assistants. These fishermen of Galilee were to be, under him, the instruments of overthrowing the stupendous and magnificent system of Paganism and

idolatry throughout the world, and producing the greatest change, the most general and important revolution, in principles, in morals, and in religion, that ever took place on this globe. For this astonishing work, these simple, illiterate, humble men were singled out by our Lord.

“Such were the associates chosen by Him who was the Delegate of heaven, and whose help was from above. We may expect that an impostor, who meant to rely on *human* means for success, would take a directly *contrary* course. And this we find, in fact, to be the case. Who were the companions and assistants selected by the grand impostor Mahomet? They were men of the most weight, and authority, and rank, and influence, among his countrymen. The reason is obvious: *he* wanted such supports; *Christ* did not: and hence the marked difference of their conduct in this instance.” *

“My kingdom is not of this world.” Not only is this kingdom essentially different from the kingdoms of this world in regard to its principles, duties, and blessings, but also in the means employed by the Redeemer for its establishment in the world, as well as in the subsequent management of its affairs. His whole procedure was unearthly. The influence of rank and of wealth was undesired; the civil power was unsought; the force of arms was openly repudiated. His kingdom was to be

* Dr. Porteus.

maintained neither by might nor by power, but by the Spirit of the Lord.

There is only one thing in connexion with this upon which a single observation may be necessary; and that is, that this call of illiterate fishermen to be the Apostles of Christ, is not to be taken as countenancing the intrusion of uneducated and ignorant men into the ministry of the Gospel. It is never to be forgotten, that the Apostles had special advantages which cannot be enjoyed now. They had the teaching of Him in whom were hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, and who "spake as never man spake." They enjoyed this teaching not only in common with the people in public, but also in private; for when they were alone, he expounded all things privately to them. And after this grand advantage had ceased to be enjoyed, they had the plenary gifts of the Spirit of God showered down upon them on the Day of Pentecost.

One word more, and I have done. Would that the Saviour would make us "fishers of men!" that he would not only assign this to us as our calling, but make us successful in it! We have heard his voice saying, "Follow me," and of his boundless grace have been enabled to obey. But we are not content merely to preach his truth, and, within our province, administer the affairs of his spiritual kingdom. We would win souls to him; we would be successful in converting sinners from the error of their way, and thus saving souls from death.

O for the renewal of our commission! the anointing from above!

O that this voice of Christ might again be heard! that he would speak once more to his servants! The circumstances of the times may perhaps be thought unfavourable to our hearing. It is not now as when he stood on the shore of Galilee, and called to Peter. All was then clear and calm; but now clouds and thick vapours obscure the sky; the wind comes in fitful gusts, or sweeps onwards with hurricane strength; the sea is troubled, and the hearts of many are failing them for fear, while looking at the things that are coming on the earth. The earth itself is heaving; masses of men are in motion; new combinations of forces are coming into play; social, political, and religious changes are taking place; the ear is engaged; the mind is distracted; the attention and energies are absorbed. All this may be admitted, but we must not forget that He of whom we are speaking can make His voice heard in the storm as well as in the calm. When Galilee is still, he hails from the shore. When Galilee yields to the gale, when the waves thereof rise and are whitened with foam, he speaks from the deck of the ship, saying, "Peace, be still." In either case his voice is heard and obeyed. O that he would speak again, and hush the strife of tongues! O that he would say again to his servants, "Follow me;" leave your favourite literary pursuits, your haunts of learned leisure, the sylvan scenes where you have retired to rest as if your work was done!

“Follow me,” from the *salons* of the gay, the accomplished, and the beautiful; from the society of learned and scientific men; from worldly politics, and courtly intrigues, come away. Men are perishing around you; myriads are dark and alienated from the life of God; the sheep for whom the Shepherd died are ungathered and untended. “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.” I will give you the highest employment, and succeed it with the noblest results: “Follow me.”

O that in answer to the cries of his elect he would speak again! Head of the Church, thy saints are praying:—

“Give the pure word of general grace,
And great shall be the preachers’ crowd;
Preachers who all the sinful race
Point to the all-atoning blood.

“Open their mouth, and utterance give;
Give them a trumpet-voice, to call
On all mankind to true and live,
Through faith in Him who died for all.

“Thy only glory let them seek;
O let their hearts with love o’erflow!
Let them believe, and therefore speak,
And spread thy mercy’s praise below.”

SCENE II.

THE GRACIOUS ONE HEALS THE FISHERMAN'S MOTHER-IN-LAW.

“AND when Jesus was come into Peter's house, he saw his wife's mother laid, and sick of a fever. And he touched her hand, and the fever left her : and she arose, and ministered unto them.”—
Matt. viii. 14, 15.

THE Gospel narratives of our Saviour's miracles are characterized by a singular and beautiful simplicity. Their style is altogether different from that which ordinary writers would have employed in recording such wonderful works. Most of the accounts are comprised in few words, and those the plainest possible. No particular attempt is made to arrest the attention of the reader, or to awaken his admiration or surprise. The facts themselves constitute almost the only appeal to his imagination. A brief and comprehensive statement of the facts is presented to us, in such language as would be employed, were the most ordinary and common-place occurrences of life being related.

At the same time it is to be observed, that there is nothing either bald or feeble in these divine narratives, nothing with which the purest and most cultivated taste can be offended. On the contrary, the candid and devout reader is charmed by their inimitable beauty and power,

and affected in such a way as he cannot be by any merely human composition.

From this remarkable simplicity of style, a very fair argument for the truth and divinity of the writings may be deduced. A plain statement of facts is deemed sufficient. No feeble aid of rhetoric or poetry, no meretricious ornament, is required. The facts are confidently left to tell their own tale, and to make their own impression. It may be truly said, that not the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but the words which the Holy Ghost teacheth, have been employed. And our faith is thus made to stand, not in the wisdom of man, but in the power of God.

The miracles of Christ constituted one of the leading evidences of his Messiahship. To this evidence he frequently appealed as unanswerable: "The works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me." (John v. 36.) "The works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness of me." (John x. 25.) "If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not. But if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works: that ye may know and believe that the Father is in me, and I in him." (John x. 37, 38.) To multitudes of the people, the evidence of these miraculous works was clear and conclusive. And persons who were thoroughly convinced, demanded of others who were doubtful and unbelieving, whether they could suppose, that "when Christ cometh, he will do more

miracles than these which this man doeth." Whatever may be said as to the Scribes and Pharisees and Rulers, the general conviction of the public mind was, that no man could do the miracles that Christ did, unless God were with him.

Bishop Porteus has very ably put the argument for the necessity of miracles as an evidence of the divine mission of Christ. He supposes the disciples to say to Christ, "You have called upon us to repent and to reform; you have commanded us to renounce our vices, to relinquish our favourite pleasures and pursuits, to give up the world and its enjoyments, and to take up our cross and follow you; and, in return for this, you promise us distinguished happiness and honour in your spiritual kingdom. You speak, it is true, most forcibly to our consciences and to our hearts, and we feel strongly disposed to obey your injunctions, and to credit your promises; but still the sacrifice we are required to make is a great one, and the conflict we have to go through is a bitter one. We find it a most painful struggle to subdue confirmed habits, and to part at once with all our accustomed pleasures and indulgences. Before, then, we can entirely relinquish these, and make a complete change in the temper of our souls, and the conduct of our lives, we must have some convincing proof that you have a right to require this compliance at our hands; and that what you enjoin us is in reality the command of God himself; that you are actually sent from heaven, and commissioned by him to

teach us his will, and to instruct us in our duty ; that the kingdom you hold out to us in another world is something more than mere imagination : that you are, in short, what you pretend to be, the Son of God ; and that you are able to make good the punishment you denounce against sin, and the rewards you promise to virtue.

“ Our Lord well knew that this sort of reasoning must occur to every man’s mind. He knew that it was highly proper and indispensably necessary to give some evidence of his divine commission, to do *something* which should satisfy the world that he was the Son of God, and the delegate of heaven. And how could he do this so effectually as by performing works which it utterly exceeded all the strength and ability of man to accomplish, and which nothing less than the hand of God himself could possibly bring to pass ? And when such works were actually performed ; when they saw him give eyes to the blind, feet to the lame, health to the sick, and even life to the dead, by speaking only a few words ; what other conclusion could they possibly draw, than that which the Centurion did, ‘ Truly this was the Son of God ? ’ ”

Beside supplying this conclusive evidence of the divine mission of Christ, the evangelical accounts of his miracles are deeply interesting, as a subject of Christian study, on other grounds : as, for example, on the ground of their extraordinary adaptation to illustrate important spiritual truth. So perfect and uniform is this adaptation, as to make it difficult to find a single fact or incident, in the

sacred story, which is not capable, without the least straining or violence, of explaining a point of doctrine, or exhibiting a Christian privilege, or inculcating a religious duty. A clear and beautiful—we might almost say, a fascinating—light is thrown by these accounts upon the things that belong to our peace and salvation. Many have felt, in reading them, somewhat as the two disciples did, during their conversation with Christ, on the road to Emmaus. He was expounding the Scriptures to them,—throwing light upon what had been obscure and hidden, and giving a new interest to what was already familiar; and they said afterwards, “Did not our hearts burn within us, while He talked with us by the way, and opened to us the Scriptures?”

No wonder that these narratives should affect us in a similar way. They are the records of a benevolence and power unparalleled in the history of the world. They are given to us that we might believe that Jesus is the Son of God, and that believing we might have life through his name. The miracles of Christ are the tokens of his love, as well as the evidences of his power, and the seals of his divine commission. It was love—divine, ineffable, and everlasting love—that brought him down from heaven; and his entire life on earth was a life of purest love. It was love to man that dictated the discourses of wisdom he delivered; it was love to man that moved him to put forth his power, and heal the sick, give eye-sight to the blind, and raise the dead. It was love to man that

brought him to poverty and suffering, and to death upon the cross. He lived and laboured but to love and bless. The most comprehensive epitome of his character and life is that given us by St. Luke,—he “went about doing good.” In this mission of love,—this march of benevolence,—all time and place were alike to him. At early morn, at noon, or night, he was doing good. In the synagogue or in the dwelling-place, on the way-side or on the billowy deep, he looked, or spoke, or touched, and tears were dried, and health restored.

We now direct attention to one of these miracles of healing,—the healing of Peter’s mother-in-law. This miracle was wrought on the Sabbath-day, immediately after coming out of the synagogue at Capernaum. It will be recollected, that the Saviour usually resided at Capernaum. In consequence of this, it is emphatically called, “his own city.” (Matt. ix. 1.) It was the scene of his ministry, and of some of his mightiest works. In these respects, it was honoured above all other places. To use the Redeemer’s own language, it was “exalted unto heaven.” No city was ever so privileged; but, alas! how sadly it failed to improve the same. Heavenly light was shining on it day by day, and yet it remained in darkness. Miracles were done in it; but the people believed not. They would not recognise Christ as the Messiah; they would not receive his truth, though confirmed by works which only the Almighty could accomplish. Their impenitence and unbelief drew down upon

them the most fearful denunciations which the Saviour's lips had ever uttered. "And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works which have been done in thee had been done in Sodom, it had remained until this day. But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for thee." (Matt. xi. 23, 24.) As far as the place itself is concerned, the terrible denunciation has been terribly fulfilled. The very memorial of it is perished. The place where it stood is unknown. Travellers point to ruins here, and ruins there, as on the site of this once renowned metropolis of Galilee; but all is mere conjecture. Let us be admonished by the fate of Capernaum. Let us think of our privileges in this land of Bibles and of Sabbaths, and diligently endeavour to improve them, lest we should come into like fearful condemnation.

For we are well assured that the principle upon which Capernaum was judged, is that upon which we shall be judged also. The principle applies, not merely to a country, or a city, or a community of men, but to individuals. This is plainly the doctrine of Christ in the following passage: "That servant which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom

men have committed much, of him they will ask the more." (Luke xii. 47, 48.) The clearer and more abundant the light shining around us, and the greater will be the condemnation if we remain in darkness. The more numerous our opportunities of being saved, and the more manifest will be our folly, and the more aggravated our guilt, if we are lost. The larger the means of usefulness with which we are intrusted, and the more fearful will be our punishment, if we prove idle and unprofitable servants. The measure of our privilege is the measure of our responsibility, and will be also the measure of our doom, if that privilege is unimproved.

Where is the country favoured of God as our own is? Where is the land in which are found so many copies of the oracles of truth, and in which so many valuable evangelical agencies are at work? Where else are the blessings of civil and religious liberty combined, so rich and abundant? May we not say, that Providence and Grace have joined together to make ours the joy of all lands? But Capernaum, exalted to heaven with privilege, and then brought down to hell in punishment, admonishes us to rejoice with trembling. The Lord grant us mercy to be faithful! May he teach us to know the day of our visitation, and give us grace to walk in the light, disperse it abroad, and bring glory to him!

But to return to the account before us. The Redeemer was in the habit of regularly attending the synagogue at Capernaum on the Sabbath-days; and frequently took the

opportunity of instructing the people. On the day to which we are now referring, he had found in the synagogue "a man which had a spirit of an unclean devil, and cried out with a loud voice, saying, Let us alone; what have we to do with thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? art thou come to destroy us? I know thee who thou art; the Holy One of God. And Jesus rebuked him, saying, Hold thy peace, and come out of him. And when the devil had thrown him in the midst, he came out of him, and hurt him not. And they were all amazed, and spake among themselves, saying, What a word is this! for with authority and power he commandeth the unclean spirits, and they come out. And the fame of him went out to every place of the country round about." (Luke iv. 33-37.)

Having performed this act of mercy to the poor man,—delivering him from his torments; and of power over the devil,—casting him out; Jesus and his disciples immediately rose, and left the synagogue. As they walk along, we can easily suppose that the disciples are talking of what they have just seen and heard in the synagogue. Their conversation turns upon the words of divine wisdom the Saviour had delivered; and the word of power by which, in a moment, the devil was cast out. As they talk about this marvellous power of Christ, they remember the afflicted state of Peter's mother-in-law,—“sick of a fever.” In the course of their conversation, we can easily suppose the question to arise, “Could not this same power, which we have witnessed in the synagogue,

cure this afflicted woman in the house to which we are going? Would it be more difficult to cure a fever, than to cast out a devil?" The more they think of this, and talk about it, the more confident and hopeful they become. At length they are all agreed to state the case to Christ; appealing to his well-known kindness, and nothing doubtful of his power. "Anon they tell him of her." Jesus and his disciples are now walking to the very house where this sick woman is. He will, no doubt, learn her case; probably, see the afflicted one: but they endeavour to interest him beforehand. "They tell him of her;" describe her case; mention the relationship between her and Peter, one of his favoured disciples. Nor did they content themselves with a bare statement of her case; for we are told, that "they besought him for her." They felt a strong and affectionate interest in this woman, and united their utmost efforts in her behalf. Their request for her is earnest and importunate. They will not take it for granted, that the compassion of Christ will be moved, and his hand put forth to heal her, as a matter of course. But they make a direct and urgent application to him. "They besought him for her:"—they believe in their Master's power, and they beseech him to exert it, and cure this woman.

This is written for our instruction: their conduct describes our duty: the same sort of application must be made by us. Prayer and faith are necessary to our being interested in the saving power of Christ. No

doubt he already knows our case; perfectly knows it, apart from any statement which we may make. There is nothing hidden from him. He needs not that any man should testify to him. The ignorance that is in us; the guilt that is upon us; the sin that defiles us; the difficulties that surround us; the dangers that threaten us; the enemies that seek our ruin; are all under his eye, and perfectly known to him. But we are not warranted in supposing that he will heal and deliver us as a matter of course. We are required to state our case to him, to make known our request. He will have us pray. "Ask, and ye shall receive." "They tell him of her," and "beseech him for her."

Observe, this prayerful and believing application was not made for themselves, but for *another*. Nor can any one of us be indifferent to the happiness of those around us, without violating the Second great Commandment, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." As often as we pray, "Our Father which art in heaven," we are reminded that every man is our brother. And if our brother be in "sorrow, need, sickness, or any other adversity," it is our duty to comfort and relieve him as we have the means and opportunity. It is our privilege to bring him, in the prayer of faith, before Him who is our Elder Brother in the skies, and whose heart is full of love, and his hand of power. True, the condition of my kindred is already known to him,—the case of my brother or sister, my father or mother, my husband, or wife,

or child. He sees their ignorance, worldliness, and sin. I cannot give him any information. But I am not therefore excused from telling him about their sad condition; or from humbly and earnestly beseeching him to have compassion, and save them. Prayer is our duty, whether the good desired is for ourselves or others. "For all these things I will be inquired of by the house of Israel to do them for them."

We have supposed it probable, that this application of the disciples to Christ was made in the course of their walk from the synagogue. But where are they walking to? The answer is, To "Peter's house." "*Peter's house!*" How is this? Was it not this same Peter who was hailed from the shore, and told by Christ to follow him? And are we not told that, immediately on hearing that voice, he cheerfully obeyed? Are we not given to understand that he left boat, nets, friends, house, and all, at the call of the Saviour? Is not this the very man who said to his Master, "Lo, we have left all, and followed thee;" and who put this fact in as a plea for compensation,—“What shall we have therefore?” How comes it, then, that he still retains a property in his house? that this is still "*Peter's house?*" This is a point worthy of being carefully examined. It is important that we should clearly and fully understand it, as containing the illustration of a principle essential to Christian discipleship. It may be generally observed, that to leave or forsake all for Christ is not always, or necessarily, to be

understood as meaning the actual renunciation or abandonment of either property, station, or friends. That persons are sometimes required, in this literal sense, to give up all for Christ, is no doubt true; and *the willingness to do so* is required in every case. To the rich young man who came to Christ inquiring what he must do to inherit eternal life, the answer was, "Sell all that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow me." He was required literally to part with every thing. And no doubt this was necessary in his case. His wealth was his idol: he loved it, and worshipped it. He preferred it to Christ; and, refusing to part with it, he went away sorrowful that he could not attain eternal life on any other terms. Christ will be loved supremely. He must have the whole heart. He will permit no rival. He will be preferred to every person, and to every thing. "He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me." (Matt. x. 37, 38.) When of two things presented to us we make our choice of one, that one is the thing preferred; the thing to which, for some reason or other, we attach the greatest importance, the highest value. There are times when men's minds are tested with regard to this, and they are called to make their election:—when, for example, great questions of principle are being discussed; when the tide sets in

against religion, and the saints are subjected to persecution for righteousness' sake. In such times it comes to this : " If I maintain what I regard as truth and Christian principle, or, in other words, if I hold to and follow Christ, I must give offence to my friends ; forfeit the patronage of some upon whom I have depended ; lose my situation ; be deprived of my goods, my liberty, my life." Now, in such a case, reason, religion, and Christ require that I should renounce all, suffer all, rather than cease to love and obey my Divine and Gracious Redeemer. Our affections are to be set upon things which are above, and not upon things that are on earth ; so that if the things that are on earth in any way interfere with, or would prevent us from attaining, the things which are above, we must forsake earth, and cleave to heaven.

In general, then, we may say, that to forsake all for Christ, is to place all at his disposal, to sit entirely loose to every thing ; so that, if it be necessary, we are prepared *actually* to sacrifice and abandon *all at his bidding*. It is not so much the doing of this, as the *perfect willingness to do it*, which we are to understand by leaving all for Christ. Peter thus retains his house ; but he leaves it at any time when Christ requires him to do so. He holds his property ; but it is subject to the claims of Christ : he places it wholly at Christ's disposal ; and while he continues to pursue the duties of his worldly calling, he is ready to interrupt them at any time, and at a moment's notice.

Nor are we now, blessed be God, without noble examples of this spirit of sacrifice in the cause of Christ. There are not a few among the poor of our land, to whom the language of St. Paul, in writing of the Macedonian churches, might be truthfully applied: "In a great trial of affliction, the abundance of their joy, and their deep poverty, abounded unto the riches of their liberality. For to their power, (I bear record,) yea, and beyond their power, they were willing of themselves; praying us with much entreaty, that we would receive the gift."

There are others whose liberalities, though large, form but a small portion of their sacrifice for Christ; their time and talents and influence are all devoted to him. Their language is:—

"My Saviour, how shall I proclaim,
How pay the mighty debt I owe?
Let all I have and all I am
Ceaseless to all thy glory show.

"Too much to thee I cannot give,
Too much I cannot do for thee;
Let all thy love and all thy grief
Graven on my heart for ever be!"

And do we not witness the same spirit in the heralds of the cross? How many at the call of Christ have cheerfully gone forth to distant lands to preach his Gospel to the perishing! The ties of kindred have been severed; the endearments and the comforts of home have been abandoned; the pleasures of friendship and of the social circle have been given up; the blessings of civilized life, and

the attractions of their native country, have been sacrificed at the call of Christ. These men have gone forth to the ends of the earth, rejoicing that they were counted worthy, even in inhospitable climes and among savage men, surrounded with every thing that was frightful and disgusting, to cry, "Behold the Lamb!" The churches of Christendom have, of late years, had occasion to glorify God in many who were worthy to take up the language of the Apostle of the Gentiles, and say, "Neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the Gospel of the grace of God."

Enter we now this house of Peter, where his wife's mother is "sick of a fever." Before we pass into the sick chamber where she lies, let us for a moment notice Peter's wife. It is an important fact, that Peter was a married man; and that most, if not all, of the Apostles of our Lord were married likewise. And with regard to New-Testament Bishops, that they were at liberty to marry, is evident from the words of St. Paul in writing to Timothy; wherein he describes the qualifications of a Bishop, saying, "He must be blameless, *the husband of one wife*, ruling well his own house, having his children in subjection under him." The contrary doctrine to this is placed among the heresies and mischievous errors which, at a subsequent period, should afflict the church of Christ: "Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving

heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of devils; speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron; *forbidding to marry.*" (1 Tim. iv. 1-3.)

There are traces of this pernicious heresy at a very early period of the church's history. But it was reserved for the seducing spirits of Rome, to bind this "doctrine of devils" on the consciences of men. She has, by positive laws, prohibited her Priests and others from marrying. The first *law*, enjoining the celibacy of the Clergy, appears towards the close of the fourth century; but it was not strictly carried out until the eleventh century. Then Pope Gregory VII. enforced it with the strictest coercion, as a necessary condition of priestly influence; avowing that the church could not be liberated from lay control, unless the Clergy were liberated from their wives. Rome forbids her Clergy, both regular and secular, to marry: she forbids the Monks and Nuns to marry, and thus practically pours contempt on the ordinance of God. And this is not all: she prohibits marriage under pretence of seeking "a state of greater perfection and holiness:" just as if the ordinance of God were a snare, and inimical to Christian excellence! We think it fair to ask, Has she attained this state? Has she raised her Clergy, by this expedient, to a higher sanctity? Do they lead purer lives than others who are unfettered by this prohibition? The answer is,—If all ecclesiastical records, and the concurrent testimony of multitudes of men in Popish countries, do not constitute one living lie, the

contrary is the fact. But we shrink with loathing from any attempt to describe the filthy practices of thousands of the Romish Priesthood, as attested by historical documents of undoubted truthfulness. If we were anxious to make out a case, we could easily call in the convent and nunnery, together with the large families of unmarried Priests in Popish countries, to give evidence that Rome has not risen to purity. But we forbear: we content ourselves with denouncing the whole celibate and monastic system as a piece of the most perfect machinery for the production of licentiousness and vice on the largest scale. It has been a blight and a curse, not only upon the church, but upon society at large; and if we were called upon to give the names, and recite the deeds, of some twenty of the greatest villains that have ever lived,—the most wicked, sensual, and beastly of men,—we should make our list exclusively from among the Popes of Rome,—the so-called successors of St. Peter. Professing to derive their authority from him, they not only fail to imitate his example, but deliberately place themselves in antagonism to it. And although we are very far from attributing all that is bad in them to this, we must regard it as a singular inconsistency, which has led to the most frightful results.

The next person in the account claiming our attention is “Peter’s wife’s mother.” We only take occasion here to say, that the religion of the Lord Jesus Christ does not dissolve any of the relationships of human life, or free

us from any of the duties which those relationships involve. The Redeemer himself set an example of filial piety; first, by being subject to his parents; and then by his conduct on the cross. The agony of his last hour did not prevent him from thinking of his mother, and tenderly caring for her future comfort. "When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy Son! Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother! And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home." (John xix. 26, 27.)

Peter cared for his wife's mother, and cherished her in his own house. Our relatives have a claim upon us which none else have. We are bound to show special kindness to them; and while, as we have opportunity, or as they need, we show this kindness in regard to the things of the present life, let us not be unmindful of those which belong to their peace and happiness in the life to come. The greatest kindness we can show our kindred, the most effectual means of promoting their highest and eternal good, is to bring them to Christ. They are in circumstances to need the Saviour's aid. They are poor; but he will enrich them: they are sick; he will heal them: they are lost; he will save them. It is ours, in the prayer of faith, to bring them to him, that he may bless them with spiritual blessings in heavenly places.

This woman, we are told, was "sick of a fever." St.

Luke, himself a physician, calls it "a great fever;" a fever of the worst type, and every way likely to prove fatal. All sicknesses, and all degrees of them, are equally subject to the power of Christ; but we advert to the description given by St. Luke, because we think it is calculated to heighten our conception of the Saviour's ability. With regard to the impression produced upon the mind by seeing him lay his hands on a few persons suffering from disorders of a trifling nature, and healing them, it would not be so great as if we saw him lay his healing hand upon those who were labouring under the worst and most fatal diseases, and at once completely cure them. So in this case, with respect to the impression to be produced, it is not a matter of indifference whether we say simply that she was cured of a fever, or that she was cured of a great fever; understanding, by this latter, a fever of the very worst type, in the most advanced stage, and altogether likely to prove fatal. It is no doubt true, that to heal at all after this fashion, is only possible to Omnipotence; but, if the case is trifling, it may not prove sufficient to satisfy this or that individual that his own case, which he considers desperate, can be as fully and easily met. The miracles of healing are undoubtedly intended to illustrate Christ's power *to save*; to save the worst, to save to the uttermost. And, viewed in this light, the description of this woman's disease, as "a great fever," has a very important bearing, in many instances, on the question of personal salvation. When

an individual is truly awakened to a sense of his sin and danger, his sins appear before him in a light altogether different from that in which they appeared before. As David puts it, they are now set in the light of God's countenance, and are consequently seen in all their aggravation. Their number and enormity far exceed any thing previously imagined. Persons thus convinced thought themselves, a short while ago, better than others; fancied that they did not need divine mercy and grace so much as their neighbours did; in short, that they were very good sort of people, and that any thing about them which might possibly require a little amendment could be easily attended to at any time; was of so trifling a character, as to render a moment's uneasiness about it both unreasonable and unnecessary. But, since the Holy Spirit has convinced them of sin, their whole views and feelings are marvellously changed. That which seemed only as a grain of sand has risen into a mountain dark and frowning; the drop has become a sea, in which they are in danger of being engulfed. Their whole character and life are marked with a turpitude and vileness which overwhelm them; their condition is felt to be wretched and frightful to the last degree. Now, how are we to deal with these vivid apprehensions, and deep and distressing feelings? How are we to meet the case of one who thinks himself the chief of sinners, and who is on the verge of black despair? We reply, By showing that Christ is able to deal with a *desperate case*.

Beside, there are unawakened men *who are great sinners* in point of fact, as well as awakened men who see and feel themselves to be such, in the light of the Bible, the law, and the judgment-day. There are around us men of debased character, who lead grossly immoral lives, and who are the enemies of God by wicked works. Their drunkenness, falsehood, and blasphemy; their revellings, dishonesty, and uncleanness; make up a conglomerate of sin absolutely frightful. The darkness upon their minds is not ordinary, but gross, darkness,—darkness that may be felt. The moral insensibility, in their case, is not that of mere indifference, or want of relish or perception, but that of death: the conscience is seared, and the heart is unfeeling as the adamant or the nether millstone. The spiritual defilement is so great, that we may only compare it with the pollution and disgusting loathsomeness of leprosy. The wicked one has not only dealings with men of this class, and power over them, but absolute possession of them; he rules in the hearts of these “children of disobedience,” and leads them captive at his pleasure.

In the contemplation of such examples of matured wickedness, there is every thing to sadden and discourage us. We pity them, and we desire their salvation; but the difficulty is extreme; and we have scarcely strength to hope, or pray, or make an effort. In the spirit of the question proposed of old over the valley where lay the bones, very many and dry, we are ready to ask, Can these live? can the light ever penetrate here? can a clean thing

ever be brought out of this ? can this chief of sinners be saved ?

Now, how is our faith to be raised in such cases ? How is our faith to be sustained amidst the difficulty, discouragement, and opposition encountered while attempting to save one of this class ? The answer is again, By showing that Christ is able to deal with a *desperate case*. His mercy was sufficient to cancel the debt of him who owed five hundred pence, as well as that of him who owed but fifty. The power of his grace was sufficient to triumph in the conversion of bigotted, blaspheming, and persecuting Saul of Tarsus, as well as in that of Lydia, who worshipped God.

Here was not simply the cure of a "fever," but of "a great fever;" the successful treatment, not of a trifling disorder, but of one of the very worst description. This woman's case was a difficult one, and, humanly speaking, altogether hopeless ; but our glorious Redeemer was equal to it ; and, advancing to the bed whereon the sufferer lay, he "touched her," he "took her by the hand," and "lifted her up."

In working such miracles, there was not always this personal contact with Christ. He did not always touch the patient. He was not always even in the presence of the individuals. He occasionally healed at a distance ; sometimes with a word, a look, a touch. Similar varieties are observable in the methods of his grace. Some are allured by his grace ; while others are driven by alarm.

The mind of one is gently opened; while, in another case, the conscience is violently aroused. Divine truth, the Holy Spirit, the dispensations of Providence, the ministry of the word, or personal affliction, are variously employed by Christ in saving the children of men. But, whether by instrumentalities, ordinary or otherwise, men are saved, it is a matter of small moment. Whether He shall speak the word only, or take the sinner by the hand, we are content. O, blessed Redeemer, only save! heal the sin-sick souls of men! take the poor captive from the grasp of the devil, who hurries to hell with his prey! and, whether thou art pleased to do this by a look of pity, a word of power, or a touch of love, we are content. Save as thou wilt; but save!

“He touched her hand, and the fever left her.” The cure was *manifestly miraculous*; for no one will allege that there was any thing in a touch of the hand to heal of a “great fever,” except as it was the touch of Him who has all power in heaven and in earth.

The cure was *instantaneous*. St. Mark says, “Immediately the fever left her:” St. Luke says, “Immediately she arose, and ministered unto them.” Her ministering was in token of her gratitude and love, and showed the completeness of this sudden cure. Omnipotence rebuked the disease, and all the ordinary effects thereof immediately disappeared. Strength was fully restored. We all know that, in the cure of a fever by ordinary means, this recovery of strength does not immediately follow.

When the fever has subsided, when the last throb of the fever pulse has ceased, the patient is generally left in the extreme of weakness: so prostrate is the person in many instances, as to make it a question whether life remains. Days and weeks, ay, and even months, pass away, while the patient gradually recovers strength. But in this instance strength comes with health. The fever leaves her at the bidding of Christ, and vigour is immediately restored. "She arose" from her bed; and, as if nothing had previously occurred, she enters upon ordinary domestic duties; she "ministered to them."

It has been already intimated that we take all these mighty works of Christ as intended to illustrate His power as a Saviour. These physical prodigies show what is his power for the accomplishment of moral and spiritual results; and serve to warrant our faith in him, as not only almighty, but almighty to save. We gather from his whole series of miracles, that "he is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him."

In connexion with this it may be remarked, that almost all the miracles wrought by Christ upon the bodies of men were accompanied by corresponding blessings to the soul. At the very same time that sight was given to the blind man, the eyes of his understanding were enlightened by the spiritual revelation and knowledge of Christ. When the leper was cleansed from his loathsome and fatal disease, his moral powers were renewed in righteousness. As soon as the demon who had grievously tormented the

body was cast out, we perceive that his power over the spirit was broken, and the man was seen sitting at the Saviour's feet, clothed, and in his right mind. With the raising of the dead body, the soul is quickened into newness of holy life.

The fact thus adverted to will enable us to understand how it is that the manner in which applications were made to Christ for these miracles of healing, become so strikingly illustrative of the manner in which applications must be made to Him now for spiritual blessings. Both physical and moral benefits were secured at the same time; and the humility, earnestness, perseverance, and faith of the applicant then, must be imitated by the applicant now. A single example may suffice. We select that of the leper, as recorded in the first chapter of St. Mark's Gospel. "There came a leper to him, beseeching him, and kneeling down to him, and saying unto him, If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean. And Jesus, moved with compassion, put forth his hand, and touched him, and saith unto him, I will; be thou clean." Observe the poor man's *earnestness*;—he came "beseeching," not coldly and formally uttering his request, but with deep emotion and vehement desire. Mark his *humility*,—"kneeling down;" St. Luke says, he "fell on his face," while he urged his petition. Notice his *faith*,—"Thou canst make me clean." He applies to Christ under the influence of a clear and strong conviction of His sufficiency of power. In all these par-

ticulars, his example is exhibited for our imitation. Come to Christ as this man did, and He will say, with respect to spiritual things, "Be it unto thee even as thou wilt."

If a question be raised, as to whether those resources of divine power are available now for spiritual purposes, our answer is, He is Jesus Christ, the anointed Saviour, "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever." It is our joy to know that such pity, power, and love, as he had in the days of his flesh, he has to-day; and that such mighty works as he accomplished while on earth, he is able and willing to accomplish now.

This is perhaps admitted. But a farther question is raised as to the comparative disadvantage of our position with respect to Christ and his gracious power. "When he dwelt on earth, he went in and out before the people: with some of them he was on familiar terms. They had free access to his presence. They saw him in the synagogue, or on the road, or in the retirement of their own home. They beheld his countenance beaming with tenderness, benignity, and love. They heard his voice uttering words of wisdom and of grace, speaking as never man spake. The living Saviour was among them. They could not doubt his power; for they saw it put forth, and signs and wonders followed. They could not doubt his love; it beamed in his face; it was attested by his prayers and tears, and by a thousand sorrowing and suffering ones, whom he had soothed and comforted. They had

thus numerous living and palpable helps to their faith in him. But how very different with regard to us, and our position! He dwells no more with men. He cannot now be seen, not even in the temples set apart for his service, and where his disciples meet to do him honour. His voice is heard no more. In their case there was every thing to assist, encourage, and command their faith; in our case there is nothing. You tell us he is mighty; and we dare not, do not, disbelieve. But if this were said to us in the house of Peter, as his mother-in-law was touched by Christ, and we saw her in a moment healed of her ‘great fever;’ if you told us this about the power of Christ as we stood by the grave of Lazarus, and while we saw Lazarus come forth from the tomb in which he had lain four days; if you proclaimed the Saviour’s power as we stood on the deck of the ship in the midst of the Sea of Galilee, and witnessed the hushing of the storm, the instantaneous subsiding of the waves, at the omnipotent words, ‘Peace, be still;’—O, if you told us of his power as we stood in his presence, and beheld these glorious triumphs, with how much greater force your words would come! Our faith would be helped; we could not fail to believe. And so also with regard to his pity and love. If we had seen him weep at the tomb of his friend, or as he gazed upon the city whose doom he was foretelling,—if we had seen him in the garden, or heard his prayer from the cross,—O, then we should hardly require you to tell us of his love; we should see it, and believe.”

In answer to all this there are two things to be said : First. While we readily admit that the facts referred to were important and delightful encouragements and helps to faith, faith did not follow as a matter of course. There were many who saw and heard, yet believed not ; and the Saviour himself marvelled at their unbelief. In some places both the number and brilliancy of his miracles were lessened by the people's unbelief. "He could not do many mighty works there because of their unbelief." He could only "lay his hand upon a few sick folk, and heal them." We are thus impressively taught and admonished, that even if our statements of the Saviour's power were made to you in the circumstances named, and which you consider so advantageous, you nevertheless might not believe. Your hearts might be hardened still, and your sin remain.

In the next place, we have to remind you that you are not without aids and encouragements to your faith. There are around you many living witnesses for Christ,—persons who have felt his power and tasted of his love. Ask them to tell you what Christ has done for them. Mark well what they say : "Once I was wretched, under a sense of my sin, and of the wrath of God. I found trouble and sorrow more than I can tell. I felt myself ready to sink into the pit ; but I heard of Christ, and trusted in him, and found peace. Distress and fear all passed away ; my spirit was calmed, and I became happier than I can describe." Another says, "O, what a

sinful life mine was,—what a wicked heart ! Intemperance, Sabbath-breaking, lying, profanity, uncleanness,—all were familiar to me ; but I was turned to Christ : he set me free, renewed my nature, made me holy ; all ‘ old things are passed away, and all things are become new.’ ” Listen to these persons ; converse with them. What Christ has done for them is as great as what he did for others in the days of his flesh ; the blessings he has bestowed are as valuable, and the change which he has wrought as mighty and marvellous. These works of his grace are as glorious,—yea, rather (may I not say ?) more glorious achievements of his power, than the miracles of healing to which we have referred. And there are thousands around you upon whom this mighty transformation has been effected, and who testify, for your encouragement, that Christ receiveth sinners still.

There is one consideration more. Although the Saviour has gone up to heaven, yet is there access to his presence now, as truly as when he dwelt on earth. We cannot meet him *in Peter’s house*, but, what is better, we can meet him *in his own*. The manner of this meeting is, indeed, more spiritual, but the thing is not the less real. “ Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” (Matt. xviii. 20.) These words are not to be taken merely as a promise, but as a plain and decisive declaration of fact : it is not, “ There will I be,” but, “ *There am I* in the midst of them.” The presence of Christ in the assembly of his disciples, is

in no way contingent, except upon their being gathered together in his name. Where this condition obtains, there is Christ, in his undiminished pity; in his everlasting power; in his condescending and almighty love. He cannot change. He is the same "yesterday, to-day, and for ever." He speaks to you in his house, listen: "What will ye that I should do for you?" "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." See, he takes the book to read; the passage selected is this: "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the Gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord." (Luke iv. 18, 19.) Well may you wonder at these gracious words proceeding from the Saviour's lips, and scarce presume to think them true. But true they are, and true for you. Apply them to yourselves: put in your claim for these glorious benefits. You need not hesitate, you need not fear. We can give you every possible assurance of his tender love. We can supply the most abundant testimony, that "he is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him."

Join with us in a song of praise; and may you realize the truth, and feel the blessedness, of that of which you sing!

- “ Jesu, thy far-extended fame
My drooping soul exults to hear ;
Thy name, thy all-restoring name,
Is music in a sinner’s ear.
- “ Sinners of old thou didst receive,
With comfortable words and kind ;
Their sorrows cheer, their wants relieve,
Heal the diseased, and cure the blind.
- “ And art thou not the Saviour still,
In every place and age the same ?
Hast thou forgot thy gracious skill,
Or lost the virtue of thy name ?
- “ Faith in thy changeless name I have ;
The good, the kind Physician, thou
Art able now our souls to save,
Art willing to restore them now.
- “ Though eighteen hundred years are past
Since thou didst in the flesh appear,
Thy tender mercies ever last,
And still thy healing power is here !”

SCENE III.

WALKING ON THE SEA TOWARD CHRIST.

“AND when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, It is a spirit; and they cried out for fear. But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid. And Peter answered him and said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water. And he said, Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus. But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me. And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt? And when they were come into the ship, the wind ceased. Then they that were in the ship came and worshipped him, saying, Of a truth thou art the Son of God.”—Matt. xiv. 26–33.

MANY books have been written, and many sermons have been preached, about faith; and, considering the vast amount of talent and piety which have been consecrated to the exhibition of this Christian grace, we might be ready to conclude that by this time the subject was entirely exhausted; and any further attempt at illustration may be deemed altogether superfluous. Plausible as such a conclusion may be considered, we nevertheless venture to submit, that there are yet many persons who

have the first principles of faith to learn ; many by whom it is only partially understood ; and that comparatively few exhibit the grace in that clearness, consistency, and power which so strikingly appear in New-Testament examples. On the whole, we are disposed to think that there is no subject upon which we more manifestly require line upon line, and precept upon precept, than upon that of Christian faith.

Faith is the instrument whereby we appropriate the blessings of the Gospel of Christ, and the channel through which divine grace flows into the soul, for its sanctification, refreshment, and joy. The character of our faith determines the character of our experience and practice as Christians. The sky above us is clear ; the prospect before us is bright ; the flow of peace within us is constant ; our spiritual experience is rich ; our religious advancement is steady ; and our Christian excellence generally is lofty and scriptural, in proportion to the simplicity and clearness, the uniformity and vigour, of our faith. The grace of faith has therefore the most direct and important bearing upon our entire religious state ; and in this fact we have the strongest possible inducement devoutly and carefully to study the nature of the principle, and to investigate the most frequent causes of its interruption and failure.

It may be confidently affirmed that we cannot prosecute this study of Christian faith with so much advantage or pleasure, as in the diligent and prayerful examination of

New-Testament examples of the grace. These examples do not, indeed, contain any logical definition, or systematic analysis, of faith; but they strikingly and beautifully illustrate its nature; and while presenting it in varied, vigorous, and triumphant operation, they supply the richest encouragement to its exercise.

It is not, indeed, pretended that any one of these examples presents a complete view of faith, any more than that the whole of any given doctrine is contained in any one verse of holy Scripture. The Bible revelation proceeds upon the principle of giving us "here a little, and there a little," so as to render it necessary that we should diligently "search the Scriptures," putting one passage with another, and "comparing things spiritual," until we come to find ourselves in possession of a "goodly heritage." Perhaps it would not be possible to construct a complete definition of faith from any one example of it with which we are furnished. But it will be found that each example throws light upon some particular element of faith; presents it under a new aspect, or in different combinations: and the diligent student of the whole will be rewarded with a clear and comprehensive view of the origin, properties, motives, hinderances, and encouragements of faith, such as it is almost impossible for him to secure in any other way.

It may be observed generally of the example of faith now to be brought under consideration, that it presents a singularly interesting illustration of the nature of the

principle, strongly marks one of the most common causes of its failure, and affectingly exposes the unreasonableness of unbelief.

A brief reference to previous occurrences is essential to a correct understanding of those with which we have now to do. Our account commences with evening on the shores of Galilee. Thousands of people, men, women, and children, are gathered together. Every thing is indicative of deep feeling among the multitude, and of strong excitement. An astonishing miracle has just been wrought by Christ; and so profound has been the impression produced upon the mind of this vast assembly, that they no longer entertain a doubt of his Messiahship, but say, "This is of a truth that Prophet that should come into the world." Having arrived at this conviction, they determine to give practical effect to it, by proclaiming him at once a King. The notion commonly entertained among the Jewish people was, that Messiah would assume the pomp and power of a temporal Prince. Under this mistaken, but fondly cherished, notion, the multitude were prepared to act. They soon, however, saw that the meek and lowly One desired no kingly honours, and shrank from their proposal. But they were not content to have it so. They endeavour to persuade him: they try to overcome his reluctance: and so resolutely have they set their minds on this, that "Jesus perceived they would come and take him by force, to make him a King." (John vi. 16.)

In consequence of this, he at once proceeded to break up the assembly, first constraining his disciples to get into a ship, and proceed to the other side of the lake, where he proposed to join them soon; and then, dismissing the multitude, he himself sought retirement for prayer. What a lesson have we here, when tempted with the world's honour, power, and wealth!

The disciples appear to have been somewhat reluctant to leave their Master alone on the shore, and they only did so in obedience to his peremptory command. Nor is it difficult to account for this reluctance. Probably they sympathized with the feeling and purpose of the multitude, and were unwilling to forego the favourable opportunity for putting Christ in the position, and giving him the honours, of a temporal Prince. In addition to this, there is reason to believe, that not only was the day drawing to a close, but the weather was already unfavourable, and there was the certain prospect of a stormy and toilsome night at sea. Christ, however, "constrained" them to get into a ship, and go to the other side over against Bethsaida; or, as St. John has it, "toward Capernaum." Bethsaida and Capernaum appear to have been in the immediate neighbourhood of each other. "Over against Bethsaida," probably indicated the precise spot for which they were to make; but in that case it would be quite in accordance with ordinary forms of expression, in describing the course of the ship, to say, it was "toward Capernaum," as this was the larger and

more important place of the two, and therefore better known to those who would read the account.

The disciples put to sea at the command of Christ. And we may suppose that they did so under circumstances similar to those so graphically described by a recent traveller in this region. He says, "After sunset I strolled down to the lake, and, seating myself upon a mass of broken wall, enjoyed the freshness of the evening. The mountains were like a dark purple frame around the expanse of the water, which reflected the hues of the twilight sky. There was a solemnity in the scene, which was wanting under the garish light of noon. All day there had not been a breath of air, the sultry heat had been that of a furnace; but now, a cool breeze came off the lofty table-land, and, rushing down the ravines that descend to the lake, began to ruffle its placid bosom, and toss up its surface into mimic waves, that broke with a gentle music upon the fallen fragments at my feet. As it grew darker, the breeze increased to a gale, the lake became a sheet of foam, and the white-headed breakers dashed proudly on the rugged beach; its gentle murmur was now changed into the wild and mournful sound of the whistling wind and the agitated waters. Afar off was dimly seen the little barque struggling with the waves, and then lost sight of amidst the misty rack. It was long before I could tear myself from the spot. To have thus seen so striking an exemplification of the Scripture narrative, was as interesting as it was unexpected. It was

even thus that the storm came down upon the lake, which threatened to engulf the terrified apostles, and called forth so sublime a manifestation of the Divine Power."

On a stormy night like this the disciples are proceeding "over the sea toward Capernaum." "The wind is contrary," and they are "tossed with the waves:" they are "toiling in rowing:" night shrouds all in gloom: "It is dark, and Jesus is not come."

It is not precisely known where either Bethsaida or Capernaum was situated: it is impossible to determine the exact distance which the disciples had to traverse; but probably it was only short. Short, however, though the distance was, they could not make it. The wind has freshened to a gale, and blows right ahead. The sails are struck, and they toil at their oars. Every effort is made, every muscle is strained, but in vain. By tempest and billows they are driven from their course, and, after hours of hard rowing, instead of being over against Bethsaida, they find themselves "in the midst of the sea." What an anxious and fatiguing night they had passed, while their loved Master remained alone on the shore! They probably expected, when they left him, that it was only for a brief period,—he would shortly meet them again at Capernaum: but now the night was nearly spent, and Jesus was not come. If he had been with them, to cheer them in their toils, to relieve them from anxious fears by assurances of safety, how different would it have been! Did not Christ foresee this storm? Why did he expose them to

it? O that they could appeal to him, and secure his help! But he is far away; alone on the shore, while they are "in the midst of the sea." Are they disposed to think that he has forgotten them; that he is unmindful of their interest, and unconscious of their toils and perils? If so, they greatly wrong him. His thoughts and sympathies have gone out after them, and, though it is now dark, he sees them. They know it not, but his eye is upon them. The darkness hideth not from him. "He saw them," says St. Mark, "toiling and rowing." How often are we tempted to think, in the night of our trouble, that God hath forsaken us, and forgotten to be gracious! But we are mistaken. His eye is over the righteous, and his ear is ever open to their cry.

"Give to the winds thy fears;
Hope, and be undismay'd:
God hears thy sighs, and counts thy tears;
God shall lift up thy head.

"Through waves, and clouds, and storms,
He gently clears thy way:
Wait thou his time; so shall this night
Soon end in joyous day."

"About the fourth watch of the night, Jesus went unto them, walking on the sea." The night was divided into four watches:—from six to nine, from nine to twelve, from twelve to three, and from three to six. It was, therefore, between the hours of three and six in the morning, when Jesus was seen walking on the sea toward his disciples.

It may be worth while to observe that to walk on the

sea was thought so impracticable, that the picture of *two feet walking on the sea* was an Egyptian hieroglyphic for an impossible thing. But all things are possible to Him with whom we have to do. Jesus, our Saviour King, is Lord of all. All forms of being, all elements and laws, are subject to his power. And that faith which his Spirit imparts, by uniting us to him, will enable us to prove the truth of what he has said, "All things are possible to him that believeth."

"When the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, It is a spirit; and they cried out for fear." It was impossible for them to conceive that any thing of mortal mould could perform this feat; the darkness prevented them from seeing who he was who approached them in this marvellous manner; and they were filled with a vague terror, as they felt themselves in the neighbourhood of a supernatural being.

On this passage, the Rev. Richard Watson judiciously remarks: "They were greatly affrighted on seeing a human form walking on the sea; for still the light was too obscure to show them that it was Christ himself; and they 'cried out for fear.' That the appearance was *a spirit*, '*phantasma*,' *a ghost*, they could only conclude; for they had left Christ on the land; and what should be able to walk on the sea but a disembodied spirit, no longer subject to the laws of matter? Their fright was natural; for surely there is no need, with some, to suppose the imaginations of the disciples haunted with such

horrible notions of ghosts as may be found in the works of modern Rabbins, to account for it. A ship's company of persons the most sceptical on the subject of apparitions, would, doubtless, in similar circumstances, have betrayed similar emotions, and 'cried out for fear' as loudly. We have here also a proof that the belief in the existence of men after death, and a spiritual world, was the belief of the body of the Jews. The scepticism of the Sadducees on this subject appears to have been chiefly confined to the rich and learned."

The power of Christ is over mind as well as matter. He quiets the fears of his disciples as readily as he does the roaring of the tempest. The mental emotions subside at his bidding as promptly as do the waves of the sea, when he says, "Be still!" "Straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid:" *be not afraid*, either of me, who am your friend; or of the violent tempest, which cannot hurt you while you are under my protection.

In going over the history of St. Peter, we meet at almost every turn the evidences of his ardent temperament and impulsive character. His feelings run faster than his thoughts: he follows his emotions rather than his judgment: he speaks and acts before he has been able to reason and reflect. No wonder, therefore, that so many of his sayings and doings are plainly open to exception. We would not under-rate his many good qualities, or depreciate his general character, as we think not a few

have done. A calm and candid examination of his conduct in the particular instance now before us, has led to a somewhat different conclusion from that at which others have arrived; and we feel ourselves prohibited from using such terms of censure as have been most unsparingly employed by many who have taken in hand to expound this history.

Peter no sooner learns that it is Christ who occupies this singular position, than he desires permission to come and meet him on the sea: "Lord, if it be thou,"—or, "since it is thou,"—"bid me come unto thee on the water." In commenting upon this request of Peter, and upon the probable motive or motives in which it originated, a series of disparaging and, as we think, uncalled-for observations have been made. This request, we are told, was "rash," "self-confident," "presumptuous:" it is endeavoured to be shown that he was "forward," "precipitate," and "self-sufficient." Now it is not clear to us that any one of these terms is countenanced by the record. Still less does the record countenance the notion, that he over-estimated the measure of his faith, and judged it to be much stronger than in fact it proved. That Peter was ardent and impulsive, is readily admitted; but that there was any thing wrong in the singular request he now preferred, is not once hinted in the most distant manner. It was immediately granted; and that which he desired was perfectly accomplished. That he over-estimated his faith, is plainly contradicted by the narrative itself. He saw a

thing achieved by his Master, which was wholly impossible by ordinary means, which was only within the compass of a power divine : he felt that he had faith in that power ; he judged his faith sufficient to enable him to walk on the sea ; and, having obtained permission to make the trial, he found it was, as he had thought, sufficient. “He walked on the water.” He did not think his faith would enable him to do more than this, and this he did. “He walked on the water ;” how long, or how great a distance, we are not told, and it is perfectly immaterial. It is enough to know, that “he walked on the water ;” and the fact is in evidence that his faith was as strong as he supposed it to be.

Some have been simple enough to say, that as Peter was an adept in the art of swimming, he probably presumed on this accomplishment, when he made his request to Christ. But surely he did not ask for leave to swim to Christ. Surely the confidence which he expresses was not in the fact that he could swim, but in the power of Christ. If it had been a question of swimming, Peter would have done now what he did on another occasion. He and his fellow-disciples had been at sea all night ; at the break of day Christ stood on the shore, and spoke to them ; and as soon as Peter knew that it was the Lord, he “girt his fisher’s coat unto him, and did cast himself into the sea.” He asked no leave ; he waited for no command ; but cast himself into the sea, and swam to the shore. So he would have done on this occasion, but that

he desired in faith to imitate his Lord, and walk on the stormy sea.

Leaving this, however, for the present, we notice the procedure of Peter, in this instance, as supplying a striking and beautiful illustration of the nature of faith, both in principle and in action. In the request for divine authority on which to proceed, he illustrates the principle of faith; and, coming down out of the ship, he shows us that faith in action.

“Lord, bid me come unto thee on the water:” the permission thus sought was essential as the basis and warrant of Peter’s faith, in the attempt which he was about to make to walk on the water. Such a divine basis and warrant are essential in every instance to the very existence of faith. There may be credulity, enthusiasm, presumption, apart from the revealed will of God; but there cannot be faith. The revelation of the divine will may assume a variety of forms. It may assume the form of a simple statement of truth, a record of historical fact, an inculcation of duty, an exhibition of privilege, or a promise of good. But whatever may be the form, the thing itself is essential. It is that upon which faith rests, and by which it is sustained. It answers to faith as the foundation does to the building: remove this, and the whole superstructure falls at once.

This revealed will of God is the warrant for our procedure in any given course of action. For example: we aim at the attainment of a certain spiritual good; or we

address ourselves to do some particular thing. Now it that good is not somehow or other evidently included in the revelation of the divine will, or the doing of that particular thing is not made possible and a duty, our aim at the good is enthusiasm, and our attempt at the act is presumption.

From the position thus assumed, it follows that the revelation of the divine will, while it constitutes the necessary basis and warrant of our faith, at the same time determines the boundary within which faith may range. We are speaking now of the things which belong to our peace and salvation; and, with respect to these, we may, and we ought to, believe all that God has declared: we may confidently look for all that he has promised, and successfully undertake all that he has commanded, but nothing more. Within this circle is faith; beyond it faith is impossible.

Look at the practical bearing of this upon questions of Christian duty and privilege. It is asked, "Why may I not believe for the enjoyment of that peculiar form and measure of intercourse with God, which Moses had upon Mount Horeb; or which St. Paul had, when caught up into the third heaven? Why may I not attempt to heal the sick, give eye-sight to the blind, or raise the dead?" The answer is, that what we may enjoy, and what we may do, is fixed by the book of God. That exhibits all attainable blessing, and is the *rule* both of faith and practice. In no part of this divine rule is the intercourse above

referred to, or the working of miracles, represented as my privilege or duty: I cannot therefore believe for the attainment of the one, or the performance of the other.

It may perhaps be proper to observe, that the remarks now made are not to be understood as meaning that we are to have a specific direction in reference to every individual act and movement of life. That is unnecessary; that is impossible. The divine law for the government of our conduct is most explicit. And, in addition, God has graciously given us general instructions, and supplied us with general principles, which it is the business of Christian wisdom to apply to the particular circumstances of our case. If at any time those circumstances shall assume an *extraordinary* character of duty, difficulty, danger, or trial, we may believingly look for special direction and grace from Him who has promised to withhold no good thing from them that walk uprightly; who has engaged to guide us by his own counsel, to make his strength perfect in our weakness, and, with every temptation, open a way for our escape.

Only, it is here to be carefully observed, that the extraordinary circumstances named are supposed to arise in the providence of God, and not from any negligence, rashness, or sin, on our part. If we involve ourselves in an evil or difficult case, by the neglect of duty, or the commission of sin, we have no ground of confidence before God. We may then expect to be left to our own resources; and, having painfully discovered their insuf-

ficiency, our very distress and danger shall become the means of making us sensible of our error and sin, and of leading us to a penitent appeal to Divine Mercy. Such an appeal may meet with a favourable response. God may come over the mountains of our transgression, and not only of his infinite mercy pardon our sin, but help and deliver us according to his word.

In applying these general observations to the case in hand, we have to remark, that, up to the time when Peter said, "Bid me come unto thee on the water," it was neither his privilege nor his duty to do so: he might not, therefore, take a single step in that direction, until he had received divine permission; until Christ had made known his will, and thus laid a basis for Peter's faith, and supplied a warrant for its exercise. For him to have left the ship without this authority, would have been rash and presumptuous; and he would have been rebuked for something else than the littleness of his faith.

It has already been intimated, that we are not entitled to expect divine aid in the doing of that which is not our duty, or in the suffering of that which we have brought upon ourselves by our folly or sin. In the example before us, Peter desired to place himself in an extraordinary position; he sought to involve himself in the most imminent jeopardy; he wished, so to speak, to make an extraordinary experiment, the success of which depended entirely upon the forth-putting of Christ's divine and almighty power. Now, the question arises,

Had Peter any right to do so? Was he at liberty to peril his life, when there was no call of duty? Would he be justified in sacrificing his life, when there was no end to be answered? Was it within his province to lay the power of Christ under contribution, to succeed an experiment which he had no instructions to attempt? The answer to all this is, "No." It was no part of Peter's duty to come down out of the ship on to the water: it was not his privilege to walk on the sea. "Cast thyself down," said the devil to Christ, as he stood on the pinnacle of the temple: "for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone." But the answer was, "It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God." Of such *tempting of the Lord* would Peter have been guilty, if, of his own mind, he had taken this step. And we think that he clearly understood this, and rightly judged it to be an indispensable preliminary to action, that Christ should give him leave. "Lord, bid me come unto thee on the water." "Thy command will make it my duty to do this unheard-of thing: thy command will be the foundation for my faith: thy command will confer upon me the honour of doing that which man never did before." He was fully assured, that if only Christ bade him come, he would enable him to do so; if Christ authorized him to assume this extraordinary position, he would, undoubtedly, sustain him in it.

Jesus immediately complied with Peter's request. "He said, Come;" and Peter forthwith acted on the authority thus given him. So far we have contemplated Peter's faith only in what may be called its elementary principle; namely, belief of the truth. He believed the truth concerning Christ's almighty power; that, in the permission just granted, there was an implied undertaking on the part of Christ to uphold him in safety, and a willingness to crown his attempt with perfect success. But it is important to observe, that belief of the truth is not the whole of faith. Faith is not complete, till belief of the truth is carried into *an act of trust*. In coming "down out of the ship," Peter *trusted* in the truth which he previously *believed*. He renounced a place of safety in the ship, and ventured his life on the power of Christ. *Now* faith is complete. The elementary principle and the action combine in simple, cheerful, and unhesitating trust.

In a book containing familiar illustrations of Christian doctrine, the following one is given of faith: "Faith means confidence; not merely cold, intellectual conviction, but confidence,—a feeling of the heart. To show the distinction clearly, imagine a man, unaccustomed to such an elevation, to be taken to the summit of some lofty spire, and asked to step out from an opening there, upon a narrow board, suspended by ropes over the dizzy height. How will he shrink back instinctively from it! Explain to him the strength of the ropes, show him their size, and convince him, by the most irresistible evidence,

that they have abundant strength to support many times his weight : can you make him willing to trust himself to them ? No. But the builder, whose confidence in the suspended scaffolding has been established by experience, stands upon it without fear, and looks down to the stony pavement, a hundred feet below, with an unmoved and steady eye. Now, you must have such faith in Christ's sufferings and death, as not merely to admit their efficacy, but to trust yourself to it.

“ A father was once amusing a number of children with an electric machine ; and, after one or two had touched the knob, and received the shock, they drew back from the apparatus, and looked upon it with evident dread. The father held out to them the jar uncharged, and consequently harmless, and said, ‘ If you touch it now, you will feel nothing ; who will try ? ’ The children drew back, with their hands behind them. ‘ You do not believe me,’ said he. ‘ Yes, Sir,’ said they with one voice ; and several hands were held out to prove their faith ; but they were quickly withdrawn before reaching the dangerous knob. One alone, a timid little girl, had that kind of confidence in her father, which led her really to trust to him. The rest believed his word, but had not heartfelt faith in it. Even the little believer's faith was not unwavering. You could see on her face, when the little knuckle approached the harmless brass ball, a slight expression of anxiety, showing that she had some doubts and fears after all ; and there was an evident feeling of

relief when she touched the knob, and found that her father's word was true, and that there was really nothing there.

“This last is Christian faith exactly. It not only believes what the Saviour says, but it acts in reliance upon it. It trusts to Christ, and throws itself upon him, and tries to hush its fears, and to feel fully the confidence which it knows is deserved.”

In the course of these observations, the word “venture” has been used; but it is not to be understood as implying any thing like *risk* or *hazard*. There *can be no risk* or *hazard* in trusting to Christ. There can be no failure; there is no danger; it is impossible to sink while trusting in Christ. Peter was as safe in the sea as in the ship; the waves were as firm as the deck. At the same time, we may very well suppose that there would be, in the mind of Peter, as he left the ship, a feeling such as we are accustomed to express by the word *risk* or *venture*. And so it is frequently in the case of those who are exercising faith in Christ for salvation. There is no uncertainty or risk; there can be none. The word of Christ is infallible, the power of Christ is absolute, the love of Christ is infinite and eternal. “Heaven and earth may pass away,” but not one jot or tittle of the word of Christ can fail. Still, however, with every assurance of the fact of Christ's faithfulness, and love, and power, there is often a feeling of “venturing” experienced by the penitent seeker of salvation. It is with a sort of despera-

tion that the stricken and perishing sinner casts himself upon Christ.

Nor is it difficult to account for this. Under the influence of the Spirit of God, conviction, distress, and desire are brought to a crisis. This crisis may, indeed, be more or less distinctly marked in the experience of different individuals; and the feeling of which we are speaking will vary in degree. But we are describing a common case when we say, a vivid, and, it may be, appalling, representation of sin is ever before the eye of his mind. The sorrows of death and the pains of hell get hold upon him. All sense of goodness leaves him, all efforts towards relief fail him, all struggles with himself and the power of his sins prove unsuccessful. Reasoning, effort, conflict are all in vain. "All hope" in himself "that he should be saved" is "taken away." The accusations of a guilty conscience cannot be disposed of, fears cannot be shaken off, distressing feeling cannot be stifled. The crisis has arrived: "None but Christ can save me. I will make one last endeavour to reach him. Lord, help me! If I perish, it will be at his feet; if I die, it will be crying for mercy.

" "Save, Jesus; or I yield, I sink!
O save me, or I die!" "

Hope, life, salvation, all are now cast on Christ; and all is safe. Pardon is obtained, peace fills the soul, and grace divine is felt.

Peter came "down out of the ship" on to the water:

he trusted his life to the Redeemer's power and grace, and, trusting, triumphed. "He walked on the water:" his desire is fulfilled, his experiment is crowned with complete success. Faith triumphs over fear, over the laws of gravitation, and over physical impossibility. He walks on the sea, the stormy sea; and it yields not to his pressure, but is firm as the solid ground beneath his feet. No man ever walked on the sea before; no man has done so since. This triumph of Peter's faith is unique; it stands alone in the annals of time. What must have been his emotions! What must his fellow-disciples, whom he left in the ship, have thought! Probably they deemed him rash in making his strange request, foolhardy in getting down out of the ship, and presumptuous in thus adventuring on the deep. They watch the issue with mingled emotions of curiosity and apprehension; but they have not to watch long. Inexpressible and delighted surprise soon takes the place of all other feelings. See! Peter's feet are on the deep, and sink not; his step is firm; he advances towards Christ. Talk of rashness, of presumption! It was faith—clear, lofty, and vigorous faith—in the limitless power of the Redeemer. To say that Peter's faith was *strong*, is to say little; it was grand, glorious, and divine.

We could linger here, and gaze awhile; but the scene is suddenly changed. Every thing is in a moment reversed. Fear overmasters faith, and failure takes the place of triumph. The man who was walking on the sea

is beginning to sink. His exultation is ended, and the cry, "Lord, save me," is heard. "But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me." These words not only state the fact, that Peter's faith failed him, but they account for the failure in a way at once instructive and admonitory to ourselves. "When he saw the wind boisterous;"—but what then? The wind had been boisterous all the night: no change had taken place: matters remained as they had been seen, and felt, and known to Peter during many previous hours. The blast of the hurricane sweeps on as before; the waves run high, and dash onward, as they have done; the spray and the foam whiten on the billows, and the frail bark is rocked in the storm, or labours in the trough of the sea, as before. The howl of the tempest is not louder, the sea is not rougher, the danger is not greater, than when he left the ship. Why, then, do these things now so differently affect him? The answer is, He sees them now through a different medium, under another aspect. Before he left the ship, he saw the effects of the boisterous wind by the eye of faith; he sees them now by the eye of sense. While he beheld them by faith, he was enabled to laugh at impossibilities; but when he sees them only by the eye, he becomes weak as other men.

Thoroughly to understand this, it will be desirable to consider all the circumstances of the narrative as comprised within three periods: the first period was before

the appearance of Christ ; the second, while Peter was walking on the sea ; and the third commences with his beginning to sink. Three distinct states of mind obtain during these several periods. Reason has sway in the first ; faith, in the second ; and fear, in the third. In the first, you regard Peter as one of a crew of ordinary fishermen, in their boat at sea, pursuing the common duties of their calling. While so engaged, they are overtaken by a storm. In this storm, they do what men ordinarily would do in such a case : they take in the sails ; trim the boat ; and, bending on their oars, endeavour to reach the nearest safe mooring. Reason suggests the common precautions to be taken, and guides them in the employment of such means as the case required, to insure their safety, and enable them to make the port. But now Christ appears. Peter enters into conversation with him ; and having received authority to assume a new and extraordinary position, in which he could only be sustained by the divine power of Christ, faith is called into exercise. A new course is opened ; a new principle of action is supplied. His personal safety is no longer dependent on the means which reason would employ, but upon the divine power of which faith takes hold. Under the operation of this new principle, every thing around is seen through a different medium, assumes another character, and a totally different class of feelings are in the ascendant. The whole attention is now fixed on Christ : nothing is seen, nothing is heard, and nothing is wished for, but

Christ. While faith is thus vigorously exercised, Peter is fully equal to his singular position: difficulty and danger are as if they were not. If the threatening waves are seen at all, they are seen as under the resistless control of Christ: if the boisterous wind is heard at all, it is heard in the presence of Him who holdeth the winds in his fist. In this state of mind nothing is feared, and unheard-of things are accomplished. This second period is closed by Peter looking away from Christ, to the novelty of his position, the visible effects of the storm, and the danger which momentarily threatens to swallow him up. Thus looking away from Christ, he immediately returns to the state of mind contemplated in the first of these three periods; namely, that in which simple and unaided reason prevails. The only difference is, that now the danger is greater; so much greater, that reason says, Peter must be drowned. He occupies a position for whose demands reason has no resources whatsoever. He cannot stand a single moment; he must sink; he sees it; he knows it; he feels it: and, "beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me." No longer walking by faith, Peter sees the things around him just as other men would see them, and is affected by them in the same manner. The boisterous wind is to him now precisely what it is to others, what it was to himself during the whole of the night, down to the time of Christ's appearing. The peril of his position is apprehended by him just as it would be by any other man. He fears the wind, and he fears the waves, because

he has no longer hold of that Almighty power which made him independent of, and triumphant over, both. Left to himself, Peter is now a lost man; he is "beginning to sink, and cries, Lord, save me."

The facts of this case furnish an interesting illustration of faith, considered as "*looking unto Jesus.*" Look away from every other object to him; fix an intense and exclusive regard upon the almighty and all-gracious Saviour; and so long as you continue thus "looking unto Jesus," as full of truth, and love, and power, you will be equal to any difficulty, duty, or emergency. An all-pervading consciousness of personal interest in his unlimited resources will lift you above your own weakness and insufficiency. You will be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might, and enabled to exult with David of old, saying, "By the name of my God have I run through a troop, and leaped over a wall." "All things are possible to him that believeth," just because, by believing, he appropriates infinite wisdom, omnipotent power, and eternal love, as his necessities require. His triumphant song is:—

"The thing surpasses all my thought;
But faithful is my Lord;
Through unbelief I stagger not,
For God hath spoke the word.

"Faith, mighty faith, the promise sees,
And looks to that alone;
Laughs at impossibilities,
And cries, 'It shall be done!'"

All this will come of looking to Christ,—believing his word,—acting on his authority. But, alas for us ! how often we permit our attention to be turned elsewhere ! how often we are interrupted in our walk of faith by the sight of things surrounding ! Like Peter, we foolishly look away from our Lord to ourselves and our circumstances ; and, like him, we immediately get into trouble. Similar effects follow in our case, as in that of Peter. Doubts and fears arise ; we are discouraged by the sight of difficulty,—we are deterred by the apprehension of danger, and unmanned by the presence of spiritual foes. We see nothing but a sea of trouble round and underneath us ; and we begin to sink.

Nor will this at all surprise us, if we consider the facts. Our personal resources for duty, difficulty, trial, and conflict, are altogether inadequate. Our necessities are far beyond our means. Ten thousand facts corroborate the Saviour's words, "Without me ye can do nothing." We cannot fulfil this duty, or overcome this difficulty, or endure this trial, or sustain this conflict. Look to yourselves ; have regard to your ignorance, frailty, and vileness, and you are undone. Like Peter, you will begin to sink. The great lesson which we have to learn is, to look more to Christ, and less to ourselves and our circumstances. We shall then each one be able to say, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." (Phil. iv. 13.) Like Peter, we shall then be calm in the midst of surrounding peril, and enabled triumphantly to walk over a sea of difficulty.

We pass on now to notice the gracious interposition of Christ in behalf of his perishing disciple, and the reproof which was at the same time administered. "And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?" Peter sees the error which he has committed by the danger in which it has involved him; and once more he turns away from every surrounding object to Christ; he has no help or hope but in him: "Lord, save me." Was there ever such an appeal as this made to Christ in vain? Did ever any one sink while the eye was directed to Christ, and the prayer, "Lord, save me," was uttered? No! no! The cry of the perishing is never unheeded. The ear of our Lord is ever open, and his heart of love responds to the earnest application. Jesus stretched forth his hand and caught him: the error and weakness and guilt of Peter are all overlooked until he is rescued from danger. The hand of the Omnipotent Saviour takes hold of him, and he is safe. Then follows the reproof, "O thou of little faith!" In the remarks previously made, we have represented the faith of Peter as a signal and glorious triumph,—as having accomplished that which faith never did either before that time or since. It may, perhaps, be thought that this representation is scarcely consistent with the terms employed by our Saviour in conveying his reproof. He calls it "little faith," and demands an explanation of its littleness; "Wherefore didst thou doubt?" There is, however, as we apprehend, no inconsistency at all. The faith of

Peter was great when he left the ship, and while he steadily looked to Jesus, and walked on the sea. But the words of Christ do not refer at all to the faith of Peter during this period, but to the time when he began to fear and sink. Then his faith was little. And well might the Saviour exclaim, "O thou of little faith!" when the time during which it was sustained, and the circumstances under which it failed, are taken into account. If Peter's effort of faith had been followed by only indifferent success, we should not have been surprised at its yielding to discouragement and a sense of imminent danger. If Christ had been at a distance, or given any sign of withdrawing his power, no wonder then that Peter should fear and fail. But the contrary of all this is true; and the failure took place at the moment when the triumph was complete,—at the very time when Almighty Power was upholding him in a singularly glorious position,—in the very presence of Christ, and while enjoying the tokens of his special favour. Well, indeed, might the Saviour say, "O thou of little faith!"

Strictly speaking, that faith may be described as little, which yields to the pressure of any circumstances whatever. The promise is true; the grace is sufficient; the mercy is everlasting. No necessities of ours can possibly exceed the provision graciously made; no emergency can be greater than the resources; no possible combination of evils beyond His ability to whom all power in heaven and in earth is given. In any case, therefore, we may say,

with holy exultation, "If God be for us, who can be against us?"

Considering the divine resources which are placed at the disposal of God's people for their safety and happiness, feeble and fitful faith is at once our folly and our sin. If we were to look to ourselves, or to others like ourselves, for what things were necessary, failure would not be at all surprising. The man who failed would be a fitter subject for pity than for blame. The wonder then would not be that the duty proved too arduous, or the difficulty too great, or the trial too severe, or the enemy too formidable: the wonder would be that, in any case, such frail ones should succeed at all.

In this light we must consider the words of reproof now addressed to Peter. "Wherefore didst thou doubt?" The failure of his faith was, under the circumstances, unaccountable,—inexcusable; and an explanation is demanded. "'Wherefore didst thou doubt?' Have I deceived thee? Did I not give thee authority? Did not I uphold thee? Didst thou not actually walk on the water, as thou desiredst? 'Wherefore didst thou doubt?'" But no answer is returned by Peter. He was self-condemned, and speechless. He could not but feel, that in this he was most deserving of blame; that his conduct was altogether without reason, and indefensible.

But let us pass from Peter to ourselves. We can easily see where he was worthy to be blamed; and perhaps some persons may be disposed to think,—if they

had only been in his place, how much better they would have done! It is certainly *possible* that they would have done better, but not at all *likely*. But, apart from this, the question now is, whether our faith has ever failed, and whether that failure has not been equally open to the rebuke addressed to Peter. We have endeavoured to show that unbelief in any case is inexcusable, and therefore worthy of rebuke. But this consideration is frequently overlooked; and when we complain of or rebuke the failure of faith, we are met by a special pleading of the peculiar circumstances under which the failure has occurred. "It was not an ordinary cloud that obscured my sky, and darkened my path. It was no common perplexity which involved me: my way was entirely blocked up. Mine was not the affliction which ordinarily is permitted to overtake the children of men, but one distressing and painful to the last degree. The heat of the furnace was intense: the difficulty was that of an impassable mountain: the enemy came in like a flood." All this may be admitted; but still the reproving inquiry is, "Wherefore didst thou doubt?" Look back upon the history of his dealings with his people, and see whether they have not, in circumstances as peculiar and extreme as yours, been helped of God. Has not his grace in every instance proved sufficient? There was darkness in Egypt,—darkness which might be felt; but light was strangely shining in the dwellings of his people. The way of Israel was blocked up,—the mountains on

either side, the foe behind, the sea before ; but he made a path through the sea, by causing the waters to stand up as a wall on either side. They were in the wilderness ; but he gave them bread from heaven, and waters from the flinty rock. His faithful servants were thrown into the furnace, seven times heated ; but the Son of Man was with them, controlling the intense heat of its flame, so that they walked unhurt, and even “the smell of fire had not passed on them.” The Lord who could do these things can do any thing. “Wherefore dost thou doubt?” A reason is demanded ; but no reason can be given. A thousand reasons can be given for our loftiest and most vigorous faith, but none for doubt.

“Here, then, I doubt no more,
But in his pleasure rest,
Whose wisdom, love, and truth, and power
Engage to make me blest.

“To’ accomplish his design,
The creatures all agree ;
And all the attributes divine
Are now at work for me.”

SCENE IV.

RECEIVING THE KEYS OF THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN.

“HE saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”—Matt. xvi. 15-19.

SOME time ago, we were favoured with the opportunity of attending a lecture illustrative of the classic remains of ancient Greece. In the course of the evening, we were shown a distant view of a beautiful temple. In the distance the building seemed almost entire. The long row of exquisitely proportioned pillars impressed the beholder with the idea of strength and elegance combined: and it was almost impossible to think that we were looking on a picture of the ruins of a thousand years. We were afterwards presented with a near view of the

same building : and then how different was its appearance ! We found that, in this case,

“ ’T was distance lent enchantment to the view.”

The pillars which had previously appeared so symmetrical and perfect, were now seen to be rough and mouldering ; the tooth of time had been gnawing at them ; their polish and beauty were gone ; and, while we gazed upon them, the predominant feeling was that of wonder, that the fractured and crumbling pillars should stand another day.

The portion of holy Scripture to which our attention is now to be directed, constitutes “ the pillar ” upon which the Church of Rome mainly rests the alleged doctrine of the supremacy of St. Peter. Take only a cursory, or, if you will, a distant, view of this passage, and it may seem like one of the pillars spoken of above : it may appear of just proportions, a strong and polished shaft, well fitted to sustain some such doctrine concerning Peter as that referred to. But come to look at it more carefully,—examine closely the base, the shaft, the capital, and the entablature,—and you will be surprised at the fact of its ever having been thought capable of even countenancing a doctrine so demonstrably unscriptural, or of giving support to a fabric so monstrously absurd. We venture to predict, that any one of you will feel that you can easily do by this pillar, as Samson did by those upon which the Pagan temple of the Philistines rested. He grasped them, bowed himself, and the building fell.

At the same time it is only right to say, that able and learned men have been much divided in opinion as to the precise import of some of the words and phrases now to be considered. And it is very far from our wish to dogmatize, or seem to claim infallibility for the interpretation about to be submitted. The endeavour will be to furnish such an exposition of the particular terms employed, as may, on the whole, be considered highly probable. And the hope is, that the general meaning of the whole passage will be clearly and consistently exhibited, and received as satisfactory, at least by the majority of those under whose notice it is brought. At any rate, we shall be able to demonstrate, that by no fair canon of interpretation can this passage be made to support the Papal figment of Peter's supremacy.

We cannot peruse the history of St. Peter without discovering occasion to glorify God in him, as one of the most honoured, zealous, and useful servants of Christ. Nevertheless, there are some of the features of Peter's character which we can neither greatly admire, nor commend to general imitation; and there are some of his sayings and doings which are open to serious exception. Perhaps it is on this account that one is all the more disposed to rejoice, when we meet with that which is pre-eminently excellent, either in his words or in his actions. One of the best things Peter ever said, was that which he said immediately before Christ promised him the keys. Having inquired into the opinion entertained concerning

him by the people at large, Jesus desires to be informed what his disciples thought of him: "But whom say ye that I am?" Peter, who was always ready, answered, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." This notable confession of the Divinity and Messiahship of Christ reflects the highest credit both upon the understanding and the heart of Peter. It was not only approved but eulogized by Christ; and a blessing was pronounced on Peter, to whom the glorious truths he thus confessed had been specially revealed of God: "Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven." These words clearly imply, that Peter had been greatly honoured by having this revelation made to him: and the Redeemer, continuing his address, discovers the import of the blessing just pronounced. It is worthy of remark, that our Lord, in the first instance, calls Peter by the name he bore previous to becoming a disciple,—“Simon, son of Jona;” and then immediately proceeds to call him by the name which he had himself given him, namely, “Peter;” taking advantage of its signification to teach important truth concerning the foundation and stability of his church.

But although the words of Peter, and the meaning of his name, are thus employed for the conveyance of important truth, we cannot, with any show of fairness, conclude that the address of Christ relates exclusively to him; that whatever that address implies belongs to him,

apart from his fellow-disciples. The question, "Whom say ye that I am?" was not proposed to Peter, but to all the disciples: and Peter only answers in their name. It is but fair, therefore, to conclude, that the remarks of Christ upon that answer relate to all whose sentiments the answer had expressed. And it will be found, that, with a single exception, to be afterwards carefully considered, the other disciples went share and share alike with Peter; he had no pre-eminence.

Perhaps the more convenient course, and that which will help the most to guide us to a right understanding of the whole, will be to offer an explanation of the several terms in the following order:—the "church," and the "Rock" upon which it is built; "the kingdom of heaven," and "the keys" of it; and the apostolical prerogative to "bind" and "loose."

"The church."—There are few words employed more frequently, or with a wider range of application, or a more varied meaning, than "church." And one feels it to be an almost hopeless task to attempt an explanation, although it is proposed to help us to a definite idea by such prefixes as "visible," "spiritual," "real," "particular," or "universal, church." In the loose language of many, "church" is made to mean every thing, from the very highest point of spiritualization, down to the very lowest point of bricks and mortar, or any other building material. It may be remarked here, that the original term *ecclesia*, generally rendered "church," is not applied

in the New Testament to a building, for whatever purposes erected or employed. We sometimes read of a church *in a house*, but never of a *house* being a church. The church is uniformly represented as composed of living men and women, and not of building material. It may perhaps be *a convenience* to call our places of worship "churches;" and if the literal meaning of the word from which "church" is derived (*κυριακός*, "of," or "relating to, the Lord") were generally understood, and the term was employed merely to describe the building as *belonging to the Lord*, little need be said against such an employment of the term.

The passage now before us is the first in the New Testament in which the word "church" occurs. The original so translated is *ἐκκλησία*, from *ἐκκαλέω*, which signifies "to call out" or "forth," "to summon." The church is therefore *an assembly of the people called out*, whether by the civil Magistrate, or by any other authority. In this sense of *a public assembly* the word is used, Acts xix. 32, 39, 40. In every case we are to understand the word to mean *an organized body*, in opposition to *a casual meeting*. In its religious application the word signifies an assembly or society of men, called out of mankind by the word of God, and is in this sense applied to the general assembly of the Israelitish people. (Deut. xviii. 16.) In the present instance the word is, no doubt, applied to the entire body of those who profess to believe in Christ, and are united in his name to worship and serve him.

This is what is called "the universal church of Christ." The word is also applied to particular portions of the universal church, as they are identified with a given place, as in Acts xvi. 5. In the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England, the visible church is defined to be "a congregation of faithful" (that is, of believing) "men, in the which the pure word of God is preached, and the sacraments duly administered, according to Christ's ordinance, in all those things that of necessity are requisite to the same." "Every society of true Christians is a church; for such particular societies are so denominated in the New Testament: but the body of the faithful throughout the world constitutes the church of Christ; and it is in this general sense that the term is here used. It is not the church of Jerusalem, nor the church of Rome, nor the church of Antioch, or of any other place, nor any body of Christians distinguished from others by some external peculiarity; but all who love our Lord Jesus Christ in every place."

This church, composed of living men and women, manifestly could not be built upon Peter, personally considered; his person could not be literally the foundation for such a superstructure. If the church is to be built upon Peter at all, it must be upon Peter considered as an Apostle; not upon any personal qualities he might possess, but upon his office and ministry. It is impossible to take the words of Christ in other than a figurative sense. They must be taken as referring to Peter in his official

capacity,—to the truth he taught, or the work he performed ; and as designed to show that the teaching and work of Peter as a Minister of Christ would answer to the church, as a foundation-stone answers to the building. This is substantially the same interpretation as that which makes the memorable confession of Peter to be the rock to which the Saviour's words refer.

“Thou art Peter, and upon this rock will I build my church.” There is here manifestly, as we think, what is ordinarily called “a play upon words.” Peter signifies “a stone,” or “rock;” and our Lord, taking advantage of the meaning of his name, declares the foundation and stability of his church. “Thou art Peter,” a stone, or rock, and “upon this rock,”—not upon *thee*, but “upon this rock,” upon *this* which bears a relation to my church, answering to the meaning of thy name,—“upon this rock will I build my church.” We think there is considerable weight in the argument founded by some upon the difference of termination between *Πέτρος* and *πέτρα*. No satisfactory reason can be assigned for our Lord changing the term from *Πέτρος* to *πέτρα*: and it certainly would have been much more direct to have said, “Thou art Peter, and upon thee will I build,” &c., if it had been intended in any sense to make him the foundation. According to this view, the general sense of the word may be given in the following paraphrase: “Thou art Peter,” a stone or rock, “and upon this,” (namely, the great and essential truth concerning the divinity and Messiahship of

Christ, which Peter had just professed for himself and fellow-disciples,) “upon this,” as upon a “rock, will I build my church.”

“The application of the term ‘rock’ to Peter is inconsistent with the reference which is made to the preceding context in the commencement of this verse, ‘And I also say unto thee,’ which evidently points to our Lord’s divine dignity therein mentioned, ‘Thou art the Christ,’ the true foundation or rock on which alone the church is built; because our faith in him, as ‘the Son of the living God,’ is the only security or rock of our salvation. And hence true faith builds on a foundation against which the gates of hell shall never prevail; and he who hears the sayings of Christ, and doeth them, builds his house upon a rock.”

If, however, it be thought on the whole preferable to apply the words to Peter himself, rather than to the truth which he confessed, we have to repeat what has been already stated, that they must be referred to Peter, not as he is personally considered, but considered in his office and ministry as an Apostle. And then, in respect to these, he was but one of twelve, all sustaining the same office, and fulfilling the duties of the same ministry, and therefore associated with him in the honour of this foundation-work in the Christian church. So we read of the church being “built upon the foundation of the Apostles;” (Eph. ii. 20;) and of the new Jerusalem it is said, “The walls of the city had twelve foundations,

and in them the names of the twelve Apostles of the Lamb." (Rev. xxi. 14.) Neither Peter nor any other of the Apostles, nor all of them put together, can be the foundation of the church of Christ. Their names are in the foundation-stones, as they were honoured of God to lay the foundation by preaching Jesus to men, by proclaiming him "the Christ, the Son of the living God," by teaching his saving truth, and administering his ordinances. But Jesus himself is the true Foundation. It was of him the prophecy was delivered, "Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner-stone, a sure foundation." (Isai. xxviii. 16.)

Having spoken of the foundation, the Saviour now proceeds to speak of the stability, of his church: "The gates of hell shall not prevail against it." It shall be perfectly secure, and shall abide for ever. If "hell" be taken here for the invisible world, "hades," or "death," then the meaning will be, that, although the members of the church will be continually passing away in death, the church shall not fail. Christ will replenish her with those whom he has quickened by his life-giving Spirit. Death is, indeed, unceasingly warring against the church, carrying off her members and Ministers without let or hinderance; in fact, claiming, and actually seizing, every one of them as lawful prey. But death shall not prevail. From generation to generation there shall be added to the church the thousands of them that are saved.

If "hell" is to be understood of evil spirits, then the

meaning is, that, with all their policy and power, they shall never be able to conquer or overthrow the church of Christ. The two ideas of "policy" and "power" are suggested by "the gates." More especially in ancient times the gates and walls were the security and strength of cities; and in the gates it was customary to hold courts of judicature, and also to assemble the chief men and elders in council, and there to determine on peace or war, and to arrange their plans.

"The gates of hell" are therefore here put metaphorically for the policy and power of infernal spirits; and the assurance of our Lord is to the effect, that, whatever counsel they may take, by whatever schemes they may endeavour to undermine or overthrow the church, whatever forces of strength they may bring to bear against her, they shall not prevail. The church will neither be circumvented by their crafty schemes, nor undermined by their subtle policy, nor vanquished by their power. She shall be safe, absolutely and for ever safe. Hell has, indeed, succeeded often in producing treason and corruption within the church; and, by her tremendous power without, in making a breach in the wall here, or destroying a battlement there, but only to be again repulsed and driven back. Hell has wielded the authority of human law, and directed the force of arms, against the church: the dungeon and the rack, the gibbet and the stake, have all been laid under contribution to destroy the church, but all in vain. The church lives still. She survives the conflict

of eighteen hundred years. During that period she has been "troubled on every side, yet not distressed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed." And the time will come when the last resources of the adversary shall have been expended, and the church shall finally and gloriously triumph; the battle shall be turned to the gate; the kingdom of darkness shall be utterly overthrown, and the foul usurper driven back to his own hell.

"I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven." The "kingdom of heaven" is a phrase of frequent occurrence in the New-Testament Scriptures, and has a somewhat varied application. It is applied to the realms of the blessed, to the spiritual benefits of the Gospel, and, generally, to the evangelical dispensation. In this last application it occurs in the passage before us. It is often taken to mean here the Christian church,—a sense which it is not clear the words ever have in the New Testament; and a most faulty and misleading interpretation has been given. The promise of "the keys" is made to mean authority and power to admit into, and to shut out from, the church of Christ. Now, that the Apostles had such authority and power, no one questions for a moment. That it belonged to them authoritatively to lay down the terms of admission to, and of continued membership in, the church of Christ, and also to exercise full power in enforcing the same, nobody doubts. And even with regard to the ordinary Ministers of Christ, we

think it can be successfully maintained, that it is their business to teach, and guide, and govern ; and that they are mainly, though not exclusively, responsible for the purity of the church, which is dependent upon the character of the parties admitted to, and retained in, membership. All this is fully conceded ; but we question whether this was meant by the promise of “ the keys.”

It is said, that when the Jews made a man a Doctor of the Law, they put into his hand the key of the closet in the temple, where the sacred books were kept, and also tablets to write upon ; signifying by this, that they gave him authority to teach and to explain the Scriptures to the people. “ Still, without any reference to this subject, supposing it is as old as our Lord’s day, the figure very naturally expresses the opening of ‘ the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven,’ by public teaching, and so setting open the doors of evangelical knowledge, and, by consequence, of the Christian church. This is a much more natural exposition of this emblem, in this connexion, than that which regards it as significant of the committal of power and authority to govern the church.”

We think this the simple and obvious meaning of the passage. And so far as the promise may be considered with exclusive reference to Peter, subsequent events confirm the interpretation. “ I will give unto *thee* the keys of the kingdom of heaven.” Peter had the honour of opening the Christian dispensation. He was the first to

preach after the effusion of the Holy Ghost on the Day or Pentecost, when the evangelical dispensation was fully and formally opened. The promise was fulfilled to him : he received the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and opened the door both to Jews and Gentiles. To the Jews he opened the door on the Day of Pentecost ; (Acts ii. 14–36 ;) and to the Gentiles, in the person of Cornelius. The fact that Peter first preached the Gospel after the descent of the Holy Ghost,—preached it both to the Jews and to the Gentiles,—explains the meaning of the promise made to him by Christ, “I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven.”

One phrase more remains to be considered : “Whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven : and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.” *Binding* or *loosing* were terms in frequent use among the Jews, and meant, that a thing was bidden or forbidden,—granted or refused,—declared lawful or unlawful. To “bind” a thing was to *forbid* it ; to “loose” it, to *allow* it to be done. For example, they said about gathering wood on the Sabbath-day, “The school of Shammei binds it,” that is, forbids it to be done ; “The school of Hillel looses it,” that is, allows it to be done. When, therefore, Jesus gave this power of binding and loosing to his Apostles, he gave them authority to *bid* or *forbid*, to *enjoin* or to *prohibit*, in the church ; in other words, to declare what was true or false,—lawful or unlawful,—optional or obligatory. And the promise is, that

what they thus did, should be divinely sanctioned and confirmed: what they bound on earth should be bound in heaven; and what they loosed on earth should be loosed in heaven. They were to be infallibly guided in the organization of the church, first, by the teaching of Christ, and, secondly, by the teaching of the Holy Spirit.

It will be observed, that the reference is to things, and not to persons; “whatsoever,” not “whosoever.” Probably, there may be a particular reference to rites and ceremonies. Such of the Jewish customs as they should forbid, were to be unlawful; and such as they permitted, were to be allowed. What they appointed in the church should have the force of divine authority.

“Under these terms, therefore, our Lord gave his disciples authority to declare the law of the Gospel dispensation, under the guidance of his own teaching, and the inspiration of his Holy Spirit;—which authoritative declaration of the terms of man’s forgiveness, and how Christians ought to walk so as to secure the approbation of God, and that the infliction of divine displeasure, which should follow disobedience, he promises should be confirmed *in heaven*;—as constituting his own law and rule of moral government, to be laid down by them first in their preaching, and then in their writings. It is this which distinguishes those writings from all others. They not only contain a revelation of truth from God, but they have an authority as law derived from this,—that God himself

acts upon them. Whatever the Apostles have in those writings *bound* is a matter of conscience; it must be obeyed, not of choice merely, but of necessity, since our salvation depends upon it: but whatever they have not bound is *loose* to us; we are free from it, and no lower authority can make it binding on the conscience, or connect with our disregard of it the penalty of the divine displeasure.”*

Having thus endeavoured to give a clear and consistent interpretation of the several words and phrases contained in this important passage, the meaning of the whole may be thus summarily expressed: In the great truths which relate to Christ, as the Son of God, and the anointed Saviour, set forth in the confession of Peter, and in the apostolic ministry, the church is founded; and, thus founded, perfectly secure against the assaults and the craft of hell. In their ministry of the truth as it is in Jesus, the Apostles opened the Gospel of grace to men. They were empowered to teach and act infallibly; so that what they taught, enjoined, and instituted, was ratified in heaven, and remains binding as the law of God through all time.

But there is another and a widely different interpretation of this passage, to which it would be inexcusable in us not to refer. It is that to which allusion was made in the commencement of these observations,—the interpreta-

* Richard Watson.

tion of the Papal Church. According to this, Peter receives an authority distinct from, and superior to, that given to the other Apostles, and is constituted their Prince. Now, if this interpretation, erroneous though it plainly is, involved nothing more than a pre-eminence of Peter among the twelve,—a pre-eminence which terminated with himself,—we should not greatly concern ourselves about it. As an abstract proposition, it is of comparatively little importance. But when Peter is exalted by the Papal Church, for the purpose of exalting herself, and justifying her claim to lord it over the heritage of God; when Peter is made a Prince, that the Pope may reign as his pretended successor; when the most astounding prerogatives are thus given to Peter, and then with the utmost coolness transferred to the Man of Sin; and when the history of the world declares, that, in the maintenance of these prerogatives, he has usurped the authority of God, and practically ignored his holy word; has domineered over the conscience, darkened the mind, and defiled the heart; has annulled the rights and trampled on the sacred liberties of man:—when we mark all this, it behoves us to examine the interpretation, to reveal its unsoundness, and its utter inconsistency with the facts, the doctrines, and the spirit of the New Testament.

When Christ said to Peter, “Upon this rock will I build my church. I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven,”—Peter was invested with

supreme authority and power : this authority and power he conveyed to the Pope of Rome as his successor : and he is, therefore, entitled to claim an universal supremacy. So says the Papal Church.

We would not run the risk of misrepresenting her views in this matter, by setting forth the doctrine of her supremacy in other words than her own. In her canon law she tells us, that "the Pope, by the Lord's appointment, is the successor of the blessed Apostle Peter, and holds the place of the Redeemer himself upon the earth." "The Roman Church, by the appointment of our Lord, is the mother and mistress of all the faithful." "The Roman Pontiff bears the authority, not of a mere man, but of the true God, upon the earth." "The Pope holds the place of God in the earth, that he may confer ecclesiastical benefices without diminution." "Christ, the King of kings, and Lord of lords, gave to the Roman Pontiff, in the person of Peter, the plenitude of power."

In the Creed of Pius IV. we read, "I acknowledge the Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church of Rome to be the mother and mistress of all churches ; and I promise and swear true obedience to the Roman Pontiff, successor of the Prince of the Apostles, St. Peter, and the Vicegerent of Christ."

The Council of Trent calls the Roman Church "the mother and mistress of all churches," and "commands all Patriarchs, Primates, Archbishops, Bishops, and all others, to promise and vow true obedience to the Roman

Pontiff," styling him "the Vicegerent of God upon earth."

The Catechism drawn up by command of the Council of Trent declares "the visible head of the Church" to be he "who, as the legitimate successor of Peter, the Prince of the Apostles, holds the Roman chair:" and it scruples not to assert, that, inasmuch as the Pope "sits in that chair, in which it is evident that Peter, the Prince of the Apostles, sat to the end of his life, it" (the Catholic Church) "acknowledges, that the highest grade of dignity is in him, and that unlimited jurisdiction has been given to him, not by any synodical or other human constitutions, but from heaven; wherefore, as the successor of Peter, and the true and legitimate Vicar of Jesus Christ, he presides over the church universal, being the Father and Governor of all the faithful, and of Bishops, and of all other Prelates, no matter with what office and power they may be endued."

But even *this* is not all. In defining the authority and power which they allege were given to Peter, the Romanists affirm, that the grant included *temporal* as well as spiritual power; and that the Pope, who is Peter's successor, is "Bishop of Bishops, Ordinary of Ordinaries, universal Bishop of the Church, Bishop or Diocesan of the whole world, divine Monarch, supreme Emperor, and King of Kings. Hence the Pope is crowned with a triple crown, as King of heaven, of earth, and of hell."

To give but one example of these astounding claims,

as preferred by a Pope, we give an extract from the Bull of Pius V. against Queen Elizabeth. The Bull is entitled, "The Damnation and Excommunication of Elizabeth, Queen of England, and her Adherents, with an Addition of other Punishments," and declares, "He that reigneth on high, to whom is given all power in heaven and in earth, committed one Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church (out of which there is no salvation) to one alone upon earth, namely, to Peter, the Prince of the Apostles, and to Peter's successor, the Bishop of Rome, to be governed in fulness of power. Him alone he made Prince over all people and all kingdoms, to pluck up, destroy, scatter, consume, plant, and build."

This doctrine of the supremacy of Peter—this Papal conglomerate of pride and despotism, of falsehood and blasphemy—is mainly, though not entirely, rested upon the passage we are now considering. Other scriptures have, indeed, been wrested to this unholy service, violently compelled to aid the proud and wicked pretensions of the son of perdition; but this is reckoned upon as affording the principal support. With the others we have now nothing to do. And perhaps, with respect to the passage before us, it might be deemed sufficient were we to say, that neither the title, "Prince of the Apostles," so often occurring in the above quotations, nor any other in the remotest degree answering thereto, is ever given to Peter in the sacred writings; and that, instead of the church of Christ being intrusted with temporal and poli-

tical power, her members are expressly required to submit to the powers that be, as of God ; to honour the King, and to be subject to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, and that not only for wrath, but also for conscience' sake.

In things pertaining to the conscience,—to the worship of God, to the salvation of the soul, and to everlasting life,—the civil power has no authority whatever ; and, on the other hand, the Church has no right to intermeddle with the affairs of the State, much less to absolve subjects from the allegiance due to the Government under which they live. It is not the church's province to rule the ruler. It is not the ruler's right to rule the church.

In reply to the monstrous assumption of Peter's supremacy, we are prepared to maintain these three things :—

I. That the doctrine which it contains is manifestly opposed to the spirit of the Gospel, and to the teaching of Christ.

II. That Peter himself never claimed such authority and power, or any pre-eminence over his brethren.

III. That his fellow-Apostles did not recognise any such supremacy as belonging to him.

I. *That the doctrine contained in "the supremacy of Peter" is manifestly opposed to the spirit of the Gospel, and to the teaching of Christ.* The spirit of the Gospel is a spirit of humility and of brotherly love. In proportion as men come under its sweet and hallowing influence, they feel that they are all one in Christ ; and

that they can with joyfulness "in honour prefer one another," and "in lowliness of mind esteem each other better than themselves." The disciples, as yet not thoroughly imbued with the Saviour's doctrine and spirit, came to him, saying, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them, and said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven." (Matt. xviii. 1-4.) The spirit which led them to propose the question, was altogether bad; and conversion from it was essential even to admission to the kingdom. "Ye know," said Christ, "that the Princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your Minister; and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many." (Matt. xx. 25-28.) A wholly different spirit was to pervade his disciples, from that which pervaded the communities of men, and was developed in the government of nations: "It shall not be so among you."

Again: our Lord not only contrasts the spirit which should pervade his disciples with that of the "Princes of

the Gentiles," but also with that which obtained so extensively in the Jewish church, and in the management of its affairs. "The Scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat;—and love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues, and greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi. But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren. And call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven. Neither be ye called masters: for one is your Master, even Christ. But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant." (Matt. xxiii. 2, 6–10.) Neither master, nor father, nor Prince is to be known among them; for "all ye are brethren."

Once more: our blessed Redeemer did not only teach this doctrine of humility, but he proposed his own example of the amiable virtue for the imitation of his disciples: "He riseth from supper, and laid aside his garments; and took a towel, and girded himself. After that he poureth water into a bason, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded. So after he had washed their feet, and had taken his garments, and was set down again, he said unto them, Know ye what I have done unto you? Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done

to you. Verily, verily, I say unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him." (John xiii. 4, 5, 12-16.) How superlatively ridiculous does the Pope appear, while enacting the annual farce at Rome of washing the disciples' feet!

It is absolutely impossible to reconcile either the letter or the spirit of the passages quoted above with the alleged princely office and power of St. Peter on the one hand, or with the many high-sounding, impudent, and blasphemous titles and prerogatives of the Pope of Rome on the other. The assumption and arrogance of the Pope, "who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped: so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God,"—stand out in bold, wicked, and frightful opposition to the spirit, the precepts, and the example of the divine Saviour, who was emphatically "meek and lowly in heart."

II. *That Peter himself never claimed such authority and power, or any pre-eminence over his brethren.* Is it not in the highest degree probable, yea, rather, is it not absolutely certain, that in the divinely inspired book of the Acts of the Apostles,—a book written for the express purpose of showing us how they carried into effect the instructions received from Christ, and accomplished the work he had assigned them,—a book in which are recorded the sayings and doings of Peter, both separately and in conjunction with his fellow-Apostles,—is it not

certain, that we shall find Peter claiming and exercising the supremacy given him by Christ? Surely, if he is "Prince of the Apostles," he will act as such. He may rule mildly, and with Christian modesty assert his prerogatives; but surely his chiefdom will, in some form or other, be asserted. But how stands the fact? We challenge the production of a single passage setting forth such claim, or reference to a solitary act in which he appears above his brethren.

Take, for example, what he said at the election of Matthias: he called the attention of the Apostles, in the presence of the hundred and twenty, to the vacancy in the apostleship, occasioned by the apostasy of Judas, and to the necessity, as he judged,* of that vacancy being filled up; and then suggested, that, of the men who had companied with them all the time that the Lord Jesus had

* It is by no means clear that Peter was authorized to take the part he did in this business. Yielding to the impulses of his nature, he was always prompt, and sometimes rash and hasty. Whether it was so in this instance, we do not presume to say. But while it cannot be doubted that there was a necessity for filling up the vacant place, it by no means follows that Peter was called to move in this matter, or that the Apostles were competent in any sense to appoint an Apostle, or that an Apostle could be appointed except immediately by Christ himself. And it is worthy of remark, that the name of Matthias disappears at once from the sacred page; that the Lord Jesus subsequently appeared, and himself appointed Paul to the apostleship; and that, in reckoning up the number at the last, there are found but twelve, whose names are written on the twelve foundations of the new Jerusalem.

been among them, one should be ordained to be a witness with them of the Saviour's resurrection. "And they appointed two,"—"they," not Peter, though he was the Prince of the Apostles, Lord over his brethren, and the Vicegerent of Christ. "They appointed two," Joseph and Matthias; they nominated these two, and then prayed, "Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, show whether of these two thou hast chosen, that he may take part of this ministry and apostleship." After this solemn appeal to their Divine Head, "they gave forth their lots; and the lot fell upon Matthias."

There could not have been a fitter opportunity for the exercise of Peter's supremacy than this. It was clearly the part of the Vicar of Christ to appoint to the vacant bishopric a new Suffragan; but he did not do so, or attempt to do it: he was only the spokesman. All united in the nomination of two, and then in prayer to God that he would choose between them.

In the assembly of the Apostles and Elders at Jerusalem, sometimes called "the Council of Jerusalem," Peter had another admirable opportunity of taking his place as chief, and asserting his prerogative. An important question was submitted for decision; and, after "there had been much disputing," Peter rose up and delivered his opinion. Then followed Barnabas and Paul. "And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying, Men and brethren, hearken unto me:" and having, as it were, summed up the arguments that had been advanced, he

delivered his decision,—“Wherefore my sentence is,” &c. He evidently acts as President of this assembly, and decides the case. *James* has the pre-eminence, not *Peter*. O, think you that if Peter had been chief of the Apostles, he would not have taken his place at the head of this Synod, and pronounced judgment in the case?

“We have,” says Dr. Burnet, “two Epistles of St. Peter : in these, if his supremacy were a part of divine truth, we may naturally expect to find some mention of it, or at least we cannot imagine that he would use any expression contrary to the existence of an authority from which were to flow the security, prosperity, and infallibility of the universal church.”

“The ingenuity of Papal advocates cannot discover, in either of these Epistles, a single passage assenting or alluding to any peculiar power as vested in the Apostle ; whilst, on the other hand, brief as the Epistles are, they furnish many forms of expression fatal to the alleged superiority of St. Peter. Amongst these are the following :—The First Epistle commences with the title of the writer, ‘Peter, *an Apostle* of Jesus Christ,’ not, ‘Peter, *THE* Apostle, or the Vicegerent.’ The Second Epistle also announces the writer to be ‘Simon Peter, *a* servant and *an Apostle* of Jesus Christ.’ Addressing the laity, he says, ‘Be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy Prophets, and of the commandment of *us*, the Apostles of the Lord and Saviour,’ claiming no separate or peculiar power. When he addresses the Clergy, he

says, 'The Elders which are among you I *exhort*.' There is here nothing of supreme authority, nothing of those *royalties* whereby Peter is said to have been 'the fountain of all pastoral jurisdiction;' and lest we might suppose that modesty or delicacy led the Apostle to use a less powerful term than he was entitled to employ, he disclaims, in the very next words, any superiority of rank, as decidedly as he had in the word *exhort* guarded against the appearance of dictation: 'The Elders which are among you I exhort, who am also *an Elder*.' In this we have the exhortation of a brother, not the injunction of an absolute Monarch. How unlike the royalties of Peter is the following passage!—'Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the King, *as* supreme, or unto Governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evil-doers, and for the praise of them that do well.' Here we have the supremacy of temporal Monarchs over their subjects recognised, and the duty of Christian submission, even to Heathen Governments, most clearly enforced."

Nothing can be plainer, therefore, than that Peter never claimed or attempted to exercise such authority and power as it is alleged Christ granted to him, when he said, "To thee will I give the keys of the kingdom of heaven."

III. *That his fellow-Apostles did not recognise any such supremacy as belonging to him.* If they had, is it possible to conceive, that immediately after Peter had received this grant of dignity and power,—had been made the Prince

of the Apostles, and the Vicegerent of Christ,—they could have brought to Christ such a question as this: “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” They could not but know that *Peter* was the greatest; and, in that case, the question was an impertinence for which we cannot account.

Again, we find Peter subject to the direction and disposal of his fellow-Apostles. (See Acts viii. 14.) Evidently there was no idea of Peter’s supremacy entertained here. The Apostles consult together about the case of Samaria; they are of opinion that some of their number should visit these new converts; and they judge Peter one of the fittest for the service, and therefore they send him.

But there is a still more remarkable fact, which proves conclusively that neither the Apostles nor the early Christians knew any thing of this supremacy of Peter. “And when Peter was come up to Jerusalem, they that were of the circumcision contended with him, saying, Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them. But Peter rehearsed the matter from the beginning, and expounded it by order unto them.” (Acts xi. 2, 3.) These private members felt themselves at liberty to contend with the Apostle,—to impeach him in presence of his brethren,—and to reprove him for what they held to be an impropriety in his conduct. In defending himself, Peter is content to give a simple history of this affair, showing that he had been divinely led to do as he had done, and that the sanction of God had so manifestly

followed, that for him to have done any thing else than he did would have been to withstand God. He explained and justified his conduct to them, and they were satisfied: "When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God." If Peter had possessed what Papists claim for him, they durst not thus have called him to account, and reproved him: and if they had, he could have answered, by reminding them of his authority; he could have asserted his princely and divine prerogative, instead of giving reasons and explanations.

Once more, St. Paul, in writing to the Galatians, says, "When Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed. For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles: but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision. And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; inso-much that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation. But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the Gospel, I said unto Peter before them all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of the Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews?" (Gal. ii. 11-14.) What a scene! What language to the Prince of the Apostles,—the Vicar of Christ,—the man who had the keys of heaven, and earth, and hell!

On the whole, therefore, we are warranted to affirm, that it is impossible to prove any fact more clearly than this,—

that neither did St. Peter claim, nor did his fellow-disciples recognise, any such superiority as it has been assumed was given to him. What he received, he received in common with the others, with the single exception that he had the honour of opening the Christian dispensation.

Such power as we have been considering belongs to God alone. It was never given to Peter, or to any one else. There is but one who holds the keys in such a sense as this. "I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death." (Rev. i. 18.) He it is who "openeth, and no man shutteth; and shutteth, and no man openeth." Christ is supreme. He is King in Sion. His name is above every name: "At the name of Jesus, every knee should bow, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father;" and Peter's testimony is, that "angels, and authorities, and powers are made subject unto him."

With respect to the Ministers of Christ, they are authorized to declare his will to man, and to preach his doctrine. They are his Ambassadors, beseeching men to be reconciled to God. And it is with them, subject to certain principles which he has authoritatively laid down, to administer the affairs of his spiritual kingdom. But he has given them no right of dominion over the faith and consciences of men. It is not with them to open the kingdom of heaven to any one, or to shut it against any one, except by the declaration of Christ's revealed will,

and the application of Christ's own law. The *Apostles* were *divinely inspired* to do this. Their authority was, therefore, infallible; and the doctrines they preached, and the acts they performed, were divinely sanctioned and confirmed. That which *they* bound on earth was bound in heaven; and that which *they* loosed on earth was loosed in heaven. Jesus "breathed on them," and said, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost. Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained." (John xx. 22, 23.) And it followed, that, in founding the church, and in declaring the will of Christ, they were so taught of the Holy Ghost, that, with unerring truth, and with infallible authority, they declared on what terms, to what characters, and to what temper of mind God would extend forgiveness of sins. They did not forgive men their sins, but by divine authority declared the terms and conditions on which they would be forgiven; and that those who refused to comply with these terms and conditions should not be pardoned, but punished.

So far as the uninspired Ministers of Christ possess this power, its nature and limits are well defined in the Church-of-England form of absolution: "Almighty God, who hath given power and commandment to his Ministers to *declare and pronounce* to his people, *being penitent*, the absolution and remission of their sins; he pardoneth and absolveth all them that truly repent, and unfeignedly believe his holy Gospel."

SCENE V.

ON THE HOLY MOUNT, WHERE HE WISHED TO REMAIN.

“AND after six days Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into an high mountain apart, and was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light. And, behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with him. Then answered Peter, and said unto Jesus, Lord, it is good for us to be here: if thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias. While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him.”—Matt. xvii. 1-5.

IN the quietude of the sanctuary we are privileged to commune with, and prepare for, another and better world. The thousand things which perplex, disturb, and try us, are for a while shut out. The cares of family and home, the anxieties of toil and business, are for a season left behind. We hide us from the clamours of debate, and from the strife of tongues. We exchange the angry disputations about social grievances, political movements, and ecclesiastical order, for the songs of Zion, the fellowship of saints, and the pleasures of devotion. What with the vast political changes that are sweeping over the

nations, and rumours of wars now daily heard, many a man's heart is failing him for fear, in looking at the things that are coming on the earth; but in the tabernacle of God we sing, "The Lord reigneth; let the earth rejoice; let the multitude of the isles be glad thereof." Confidence and peace are realized in the courts of God. Here we occupy a position somewhat analogous to that of the adventurous tourist on the mountain-top. A bright sky is above him, and he looks calmly down on the dark rolling clouds, the breaking storm, and the flashing lightning, far below him. He is elevated above the gloom and the peril, and only hears the reverberation of the distant thunder. It is clear above him, and quiet around.

Reader, we would guide you to a mountain scene, grander far than that alluded to. We would guide you there, in the hope that some of those gracious influences which came upon the original spectators may come upon you, and that you with them may be constrained to say, "Master, it is good for us to be here."

It is often extremely difficult to determine the precise localities of sacred narrative: some of them are involved in hopeless uncertainty; but, with regard to most, we may with care arrive at a reasonable probability. In regard to the scene of our Lord's transfiguration, it was from the earliest times believed to have been Mount Tabor, situated in Galilee, in the plain of Esdraelon. We cannot speak positively as to whether this belief was

correct: we can affirm nothing beyond the probability that it was so.

The appearance of Mount Tabor is exceedingly striking and beautiful. It rises, in a conical form, from the most extensive plain in Palestine. The height is considerable, though not equal to the measurement given by Josephus. The sides are covered with shrubs and trees, some of the latter being of magnificent growth. The ascent, by a winding pathway, is so easy, that it may be performed on horseback. On the summit there is a plain of considerable extent. Dr. Olin, speaking of the splendid oaks of Tabor, says, "Their dense spreading foliage gives to the mountain-side the aspect of a forest; while the trees are actually so remote from each other, as not to injure vegetation, nor would they interfere much with the scythe or the plough. The view strongly reminded me of the extensive wooded lawns seen about noble country-seats in many parts of England."

The lofty summit of Mount Tabor commands one of the most extensive and enchanting prospects to be imagined. Beneath us is spread out the fertile plain of Esdraelon, beautified and enriched by the husbandman's skill. The delighted eye, having wandered over the fields of Jezreel, rests upon the Mediterranean Sea. Eastward is the Sea of Galilee, and on the north the snow-clad summits of Lebanon. Mountain and valley, forest and field, lake, river, and sea, unite in a scene of wondrous beauty.

But we do not ask you to accompany us to "the Holy

Mount," for the purpose of showing you the natural scenery, rich and enchanting though it be; but to behold your Saviour while he makes his glory visible, and to listen to the conversation of visitors from heaven, who have come to do him honour.

"Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into a high mountain apart." These were the chosen three to witness this remarkable event in the Saviour's life. They appear to have enjoyed the special confidence of Christ, and were distinguished by him from their fellow-disciples on several important occasions. It may be observed that among the Jews the testimony of two or three persons was required in order to the establishment of a fact. These three, then, Peter, James, and John, are competent to establish what they saw, when they were privileged above all others to be "eye-witnesses of his majesty."

St. Luke tells us that our Saviour, thus accompanied by his three disciples, went up into this mountain to pray; and that it was as he prayed, that the glorious change took place. This is an interesting and important addition to the account which St. Matthew has given us, and suggests a train of profitable and pleasing thought. It reminds us how with the humbled condition of Christ are associated facts and scenes demonstrative of his glory; and tells us that, though now found in fashion as a man, he is the Almighty's fellow.

Prayer is the language of dependence. It is the appli-

cation of the weak to the strong,—of the poor and needy to the affluent. The Son of God was humbled now; the brightness of the Father's glory was obscured; the beloved Son was in a servant's form; the Lord of all was poor; and, as one of ourselves, is praying to his God and ours. But, though humbled in the attitude of prayer, he is exalted in a wondrous fashion.

“The Word was,” indeed, “made flesh,” frail, needy, and perishing “flesh,” and “dwelt among us,” as one of us, only poorer and more afflicted; “stricken, smitten of God; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief:” nevertheless, there were times when “we beheld his glory, the glory as of the Only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.” It is deeply interesting to observe how the Saviour's divine glory is associated with the feebleness of his human nature, and the meanness of his worldly estate.

Look at this for a moment. Is the Redeemer born in obscurity? Angels herald the event; the glory of the Lord shines forth on Bethlehem, and a multitude of the heavenly host is heard singing, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good-will toward men.” Is there no room found in the inn for Joseph, and for Mary his mother, so that the babe is laid in a manger? It is so; but, behold, an unusual star appears in the East; wise men are guided by it to the place where the babe is lying; they bring him gifts of gold, and frankincense, and myrrh, and come to worship him. Are his parents driven

with him into Egypt by the jealous Herod? Yes; but the angel of the Lord directs the flight. Is he baptized in the river Jordan? Behold, the heavens are opened, the Holy Ghost descends, and, like a dove, is seen to rest upon him, while a voice from the excellent glory is heard, saying, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Is he led into the wilderness, to be there tempted of the devil? Angels minister to him, and he gloriously triumphs. See! he is rocked in the tempest on the Sea of Galilee; the ship in which he sails is in jeopardy: but he rises and says, "Peace, be still," and there is a great calm. Though poor, he feeds thousands; and a fish brings him money in its mouth, to enable him to pay tribute. The rabble mob of his enemies come to take him; he speaks, and they suddenly fall back. When nailed to the cross, all nature sympathizes with him; the heavens are dark, the veil of the temple is rent, the earth quakes, and the graves open; and as he dies, he gives life to the penitent thief, and admits him to paradise. So in the instance before us, "as he prayed, the fashion of his countenance was changed;" while humbled, he is exalted; and the suppliant appears in the majesty of God.

"He was transfigured before them." He was changed. The word used may indicate either a change of substance or of appearance. Probably the latter chiefly is intended here. The whole appearance of Christ was suddenly and singularly changed; he had been in the form of a servant, but he now appears in the form of God. "The fashion

of his countenance was altered." And the alteration consisted in this,—that his face did "shine as the sun." His raiment, also, became "exceeding white," white as snow, white as the light, "glistening," dazzling as the vivid lightning, "so as no fuller on earth can white them." No garments had ever been whitened like these, or made to shine with so brilliant a lustre.

"The indwelling Deity darted out its rays through the veil of his flesh; and that with such transcendant splendour, that he no longer bore the form of a servant. His face shone with divine majesty, like the sun in its strength; and all his body was so irradiated by it, that his clothes could not conceal its glory, but became white and glistening as the very light with which he covered himself as with a garment."

In the further contemplation of this glorious scene, it may be convenient to arrange our observations under these four particulars:—

I. The probable design of this manifestation.

II. The illustrious and heavenly visitors.

III. The subject of their conversation.

IV. The effect of the whole on Peter.

As to the probable design of the transfiguration, we think it is chiefly to be viewed in the light of a solemn inauguration of Christ as the supreme Lawgiver and Teacher in the evangelical dispensation. Moses and Elias may be regarded as sustaining a representative character; the former representing the Law, and the latter the

Prophets. They appear on this occasion, that they may vacate their offices in favour of Christ, and merge their authority in his. They speak with him, yield up to him, then disappear. Christ only remains. His authority and teaching supersede all that have preceded. The Law and the Prophets looked forward to him, and, having now received their fulfilment in him, they pass away in the persons of Moses and Elias. And now that they are gone, our attention is to be fixed exclusively upon him, and our service given to him. A voice is heard from the cloud, saying, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him." "Hear him:" he is the great Teacher sent from God: in him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge; the Spirit is not given by measure to him; the fulness of the Godhead dwells in him bodily. He is competent to reveal the will of God to man, and infallibly to interpret and apply both the Law and the Prophets. "Hear him;" he speaks with perfect wisdom, and with divine authority. His doctrine is true, and his precepts are binding. He makes every thing that belongs to our peace and salvation plain. He removes the obscurity and supplies the deficiency of all former revelations. "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the Prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son." And by the superiority of the Son of God, in point of excellence, dignity, and glory, over Moses and the Prophets, we are bound to hear him with a degree of

attention, reverence, and lowly submission, to which no creature, however gifted, is entitled. "Hear him," therefore: "For if the word spoken by angels was steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompence of reward; how shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him?" In him is fulfilled the divine promise: "A Prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you. And it shall come to pass, that every soul which will not hear that Prophet shall be destroyed from among the people." "Hear him, and your souls shall live." "Hear him." Moralists, philosophers, and political economists may propose their systems: ecclesiastics may gather in council, deliberate, and draw up their judgment: but the God who made us, and before whose bar we must be judged, calls us away from all forms of human utterance, counsel, and decision, to his own beloved Son, and says, "Hear him." In so far as others echo the sayings of the Son of God, well; we ought to hear them: but whoever may be the speaker whose sentiments disagree with those of Christ, turn away from him; close your ears; give him no attention.

There are, indeed, many things of which Christ does not speak to us at all,—things of art, of science, of politics, and of human law. If you would know these, and understand them, listen to the philosopher, the politician, or

the lawyer. Listen with the degree of respectful attention which the importance and interest of the subject, on the one hand, and the learning, ability, and office of the speaker, on the other, may be entitled to receive. While he keeps within his province, “hear him :” but if he shall travel beyond, and bring his politics, science, or law, into collision with the sayings of Christ, then hear Christ, and not him. Let Christ be true, if every man should be a liar. He speaks unerringly,—speaks the whole counsel of God,—speaks with divine authority, from which there is no appeal. “*Hear him.*”

Thus to concentrate and fix the attention of mankind upon Christ, as the supreme Lawgiver and Teacher of the evangelical dispensation, he was now solemnly and gloriously inaugurated. This we consider to have been the primary design of this glorious manifestation, but by no means the only one. It shows us the harmony of all previous dispensations with that of Christ. The great facts of human duty and salvation were the same, whether revealed under the patriarchal, Mosaic, or prophetic dispensations, as those now to be revealed more fully by the teaching of the Son of God.

The Law and the Prophets, whilst subserving the purposes of the present time, were full of Christ, and could only receive their complete accomplishment in him. And now that Moses and Elias, as their representatives, are in company with Christ on the Holy Mount, they all three find a common subject of conversation. There were,

no doubt, differences in the mode of statement employed by Moses and Elias, and the information they respectively conveyed was varied in degree; but the truth was the same, as delivered by both. Ceremonies and sacrifices were employed by the one; symbols and dark sayings of old by the other; but both exhibited to the faith of former times the coming and work of the Saviour. And now that the time for such exhibition is past,—now that Christ himself is come,—Moses and Elias meet him on the Holy Mount, and, having conversed with him for a while, they pass away. Misty daybreak and the light of the morning are followed by the fulness and brightness of noon.

This brilliant scene may also be considered as intended to fortify the minds of the disciples against the trials which awaited them, by showing them the reality of a future state, together with its glory and blessedness. Two of the illustrious saints of God, who had long since been removed from earth, return for a season, and appear in glory. Well might St. Peter afterwards say, referring to this scene, “We have not followed cunningly devised fables.”

May we not also take the transfiguration of Christ as furnishing an emblem of human nature in its glorified state? The Christian hope is, that we shall all be changed,—“that when he shall appear, we shall be like him;” for, at his coming, he will “change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body.”

We may not speculate on the properties of that “glorious body ;” but we are sure that it will be no more characterized by imperfection, deformity, or liability to decay,—it will no more be susceptible of weariness or pain,—it will no more be as a drag upon the soul, impeding its progress, and limiting the range of its loftiest powers. Spiritual, perfect, beautiful, and immortal, that body will be a glorious vehicle for the beatified spirit.

“Behold, there talked with him two men, which were Moses and Elias, who appeared in glory.” Observe the particularity of this account. They were *two men*,—they were *Moses and Elias*,—they *appeared in glory*,—they were *talking with Jesus*. In the world to come, men are made “as the angels of God ;” but they do not cease to be men. They mingle with the angelic host in the worship and service of God : they gaze upon the same glorious manifestations of the Deity, and share in that fulness of joy which is in his presence, and in those pleasures for evermore which are at his right hand. But though exalted to the companionship of angels, and with them made happy and glorious, they do not cease to be men. Heaven is inhabited by angels, *and by men* ; the high praises of God are chanted by angels, *and by men*. Human nature, though changed, perfected, and immortalized, *abideth for ever*.

But not only does human nature abide, but *personal identity* is also retained in heaven. These two *men* were *Moses and Elias*. They are not simply two glorified men ;

but the one is recognised as Moses, the Lawgiver of the Jews, and the other as Elias, the famous Prophet. We do not now inquire by what means the disciples learned that these two were Moses and Elias,—whether by some species of intuition, such as we may well suppose glorified spirits to possess; or whether they gathered the names of the illustrious men from the conversation which took place; or whether they were directly informed who these men were: all this is immaterial to us. We are content to know that these two men were *Moses* and *Elias*; that, however long they have been absent from earth, and whatever change may have passed upon them, they are Moses and Elias still.

Nor is this the only passage from which we learn that personal identity is retained in heaven. It is obviously implied in a certain representation of the happiness and glory of the heavenly world, which our Redeemer frequently made use of. The saved of the Lord, he tells us, “shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of God.” Now, the happiness arising out of this association, and our sense of the honour implied in it, depend upon our being able to identify these three as the illustrious saints and servants of God known by the names of Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob. For example: promise us that we shall have the honour and happiness of sitting down with our beloved Queen, and then simply introduce us to the presence of an amiable, intelligent, beautiful, and accomplished lady; and, we ask, will our

expectations be realized? will the promise have been fulfilled? No. It is essential that the *lady* be known as *the Queen*, in order to our appreciation of the honour conferred.

It would be altogether out of place here, were we to attempt to deal with the purely metaphysical question, "What constitutes personal identity?" But, whatever that is, the facts of the case before us clearly show, that it is wholly independent of our physical organization,—survives death,—and is not interfered with by the glorious transformation through which both body and soul must pass, before the individual saint is made perfect in the blessedness of heaven.

The principle which thinks and feels is distinct from the body with which it is associated. This principle is mind. According to the language of every-day life, the mind is the individual. He says, "My hands, my eyes, my feet;" "These hands, and eyes, and feet belong to *me*." It was in this way that Socrates spoke to his friends, just before he drank the poison, to which he had been condemned by the Athenian Judges. "How would you be buried?" said his friend. "Just as you please," said Socrates, "*if you can but catch me*, and I do not elude your pursuit. He thinks that *I am he whom he shall shortly see dead*; and he asks, how I would be buried? I have asserted, that, after I have drunk the poison, *I shall no longer remain with you, but shall depart to certain felicities of the blessed.*"

This thinking principle,—this self,—is independent of the body; so that its individuality “would be as little destroyed, though every particle of the body were completely changed, as the individuality of the body itself would be destroyed by a change of the mere garments that invest it. The manner in which the mind is united to a system of particles which are in a perpetual state of flux, is, indeed, more than we can ever hope to be able to explain; though it is really not more inexplicable than its union to such a system of particles would be, though they were to continue for ever unchanged.

“We may remark, however, by the way, that though the constant state of flux of the corporeal particles furnishes no argument against the identity of the principle which feels and thinks,—if feeling and thought be states of a substance that is essentially distinct from these changing particles,—the unity and identity of this principle, amid all the corpuscular changes, furnish a very strong argument in disproof of those systems which consider thought and feeling as the result of material organization.”*

We are conscious of being the same individuals now, as we were a month or a year ago, or at any other period of time as far back as our memory will go. And yet it is an undoubted fact, that the matter of which the body is composed is undergoing constant change; and that, in the course of a very few years, its entire amount is

removed. We have not the same body for any two minutes together during the entire period of life ; we are, nevertheless, the same individuals.

Now, with regard to Moses, he had been dead some fourteen hundred years. His body was buried in the land of Moab. His death was, indeed, peculiar ; but it was a separation of the soul and body. The soul returned to God, and the body was buried in a valley over against Beth-peor. We have no evidence whatever that the body of Moses was raised. It is a mere gratuitous assumption to suppose that it was so. Nor was the resurrection of the body of Moses necessary. Moses, and the body of Moses, are two distinct things. Moses appears in glory ; though, for aught we know to the contrary, the body of Moses has, ages ago, been resolved into its primitive earth ; and the various particles of which it was composed have been endlessly and inconceivably transmuted through vegetable and animal nature. The gathering and uniting together of these particles, their re-construction into the body of Moses, on the morning of the resurrection, surpasses all our thought, and is only possible to the Omnipotent. But, while we cannot possibly understand, we wonder and adore ; and, believing, say with Job, “ I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth ; and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God : whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another ; though my reins be consumed within me.”

We may be asked whether departed spirits are, in any sense, *embodied*, between the period of death and the resurrection. We answer, Probably they are, in the sense of being possessed of some ethereal vehicle, the nature of which we cannot now comprehend. We think this position could be both philosophically and scripturally maintained; but it is not necessary now. All that we are at present concerned to show is, that, whatever that is which is essential to personal identity, it is wholly independent of our physical organization; and we cite this appearance of Moses on the Holy Mount as the illustration and example.

We have spoken of personal identity as surviving death; but it may be thought that this example of Moses is scarcely sufficient to sustain this position, inasmuch as it can be shown that probably the death of Moses was altogether peculiar. Now, we can easily admit that peculiarity: we can allow the utmost, and say that Moses died after a manner unique; that he died, as a Jewish Rabbi would say, "by a kiss of the Word of the Lord." The death, however, was *real*; the soul was *actually separated from the body*; and *Moses lived after death*.

But the history before us carries us one step farther in this line of thought: it shows us that personal identity is neither interfered with, nor destroyed, in the glorious change which passes upon both body and soul when the individual saint is perfected in the blessedness of heaven. St. Paul, in his First Epistle to the Corinthians, dis-

courses at large, and most eloquently, on the necessity of this change. He commences by affirming, that "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption;" and then, referring to the case of those who shall be alive on the earth at the time of Christ's coming, he tells us that, although they shall not die, they "shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump." Their bodies will be so changed as to become *spiritual*, like the bodies of those who shall be raised from the dead. But, after this change, whatever the nature and extent of it, the subjects of it will be *the same individuals* as before it took place. In support of this position, we take the example of Elias, who now appeared on the mountain with Christ. This change had passed upon him when he was taken up to heaven, some eight hundred years before, in a chariot of fire. Only the soul of Moses went to heaven, and was glorified; but both the body and soul of Elijah were translated and glorified together. But his personal identity was unaffected by the change: he is Elijah still, and appears in glory.

We may not farther enlarge upon these deeply interesting topics, and will therefore only say, that the appearance of these two illustrious and glorified men upon the Mount of Transfiguration is in evidence of two things: first, that departed saints are immediately in glory; that no unconscious interval, no long period of sleep, intervenes between death and the resurrection morn; but that

to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord: secondly, that, as personal identity is retained in heaven, we have the strongest reason to believe that the saints hereafter, though inconceivably changed and glorified, will still be able to know each other in the skies.

Cease we now to look upon these men from heaven, and let us listen to what they say. The subject of their conversation is given by St. Luke: "They spake of His decease, which He should accomplish at Jerusalem." This was not a new subject to any one of them. The sacrifices offered under the Law of Moses, and more particularly that of the paschal lamb, were typical of that one Divine Sacrifice which should be offered, in the fulness of time, for the sins of the world: they were to receive their fulfilment in that very decease of which they are now conversing. The Prophets, who were represented by Elias, spake of Christ. Indeed, "the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." "To him give all the Prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins." Messiah, of whose coming all the prophecies are full, was to be cut off for the sins of the people, to be "wounded for their transgressions, and bruised for their iniquities."

And as to the Saviour himself, he had contemplated his decease from the beginning. For that he had come into the world. He lived with men that he might die for them. This event was ever in his mind. He often conversed about it with his disciples, though they were slow

of heart to understand. They shrank from the disclosure of his sufferings and death. Shortly before this very scene was witnessed on Mount Tabor, Christ had told his disciples "that he must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the Elders and Chief Priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day. Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee." But so important did he know that death to be for the life of the world, so absolutely necessary, that he turned on Peter, and said, "Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men." The great design he had in view was to accomplish this decease at Jerusalem; and he therefore calls Peter, who sought to persuade him not to suffer thus, "an offence;" literally, a *stumbling-block*, an *impediment*, in his way.

The subject which was thus unwelcome to the disciples was differently regarded on the Mount by Moses and Elias. They understood it better, knew its design, and something of the glory that should follow; and they conversed with Christ about it.

"They spake of his *decease*." There is a peculiarity in this expression, as applied to the death of Christ. The word means *exit*, or *going out*, and is used by St. Peter when alluding to his own death: "Moreover, I will endeavour that ye may be able after my decease to have these things always in remembrance." Death is a departure

or going out from this life. There may possibly be an allusion to the *exodus* or departure of the children of Israel from Egypt. They went out from *bondage and humiliation*; so Jesus is now about to go out of the scene of his humiliation and pain.

“They spake of his decease which he should *accomplish* ;” not of the death he should die, but the decease he should *accomplish*. The death of Christ was voluntary : “Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again.” When Peter drew his sword in the garden, to defend his Master from the rabble who had come to apprehend him, he said, “Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?” As he hung on the cross, he was taunted with these words: “He saved others; himself he cannot save:”—a great truth, and a great lie. “He saved others,”—what a glorious truth! “Himself he cannot save.” O yes, he can; but he will not. “Himself he cannot save.” No; but it is his love that hinders, and not the want of power.

On no other occasion did two glorified men ever converse in the hearing of mortals. All the more interest is therefore attached to the subject of their conversation. And we may be excused if we take their choice of a sub-

ject, in the present instance, as justifying the transcendent importance which we attach to the death of Christ, and the prominence we give it in our pulpit ministrations.

Around the cross upon which this decease was accomplished, are gathered our faith, affections, and hope. We were guilty and condemned; but he took the handwriting of ordinances which was against us, and nailed it to his cross. We were, because of sin, adjudged to die; but he died for us, "the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God." His death was our life. Through the rent veil of his flesh we pass into the holiest, and on to the sky. Well may this decease therefore be the theme of our converse, as it is the foundation of our hope. Well may we talk of it, since it was interesting and important enough to engage the attention of Moses and Elias, and to form the subject of their conversation amid the divine glories of this marvellous scene. There are other themes, indeed, on which we may lawfully converse, and in conversing upon which our minds are exhilarated, our hearts improved, and our happiness promoted. But this is the grandest theme of all.

We may, from some lofty summit, gaze with enchanted feeling upon the beautiful and magnificent scenery of nature, and find a subject of the most agreeable and improving conversation. Or, traversing the fields of science, we may find at every step some new cause of wonder and of admiration; and in the laws and elements of nature, as exhibited in the interesting, beautiful, and

mysterious processes which are constantly going on around us, we shall not fail of a subject worthy the converse of the best and most gifted of men. Or, if our steps are directed towards the province of art, we shall find, in the results of the taste, ingenuity, skill, and power of man, a thousand themes for profitable and pleasant conversation. But there is a subject more important than them all, a theme of loftier interest, and of more blissful and ennobling influence, both upon the character and condition, the intellect and destinies, of man,—the decease which was accomplished at Jerusalem. In that event there was the most complete and glorious unfolding of the moral character of God, and the principles of his administration. There was a splendid triumph over the subtilty, malignity, and power of the first and great disturber of the universe; there was laid a foundation for the hopes of a ruined race; and there were supplied the means of effectually securing happiness, honour, immortality, and eternal life to the millions of mankind. We would under-estimate nothing, whether good or evil. We would give all due importance to the affairs of earth. But we are called to listen to those glorified men; and “*they* speak of His decease which He should accomplish at Jerusalem.” Prodigious movements are taking place, vast political changes are sweeping over the nations, ancient dynasties are breaking up, thrones are tottering, and the time for shaking the heavens and the earth is come; but we speak not of these: we speak of the decease accomplished at

Jerusalem. This is the study of angelic minds, and will be the burden of an endless song around the throne of God in heaven.

Hitherto we have been so absorbed in the contemplation of this wonderful scene, that we have hardly found an opportunity of saying a single word about Peter; indeed, we had almost forgotten him. But we will now give our very best attention to what he has to say, with a view to ascertaining what was the effect produced upon him by what he had seen and heard.

He speaks like one who is somewhat confused, and as if overpowered by peculiar emotions, which he must express in order to relieve himself. He has not yet had time to arrange his thoughts; and, consequently, what he says is neither remarkable for wisdom, nor for appropriateness to the occasion. Perhaps we need not be surprised at this; for the fact is, that he and his fellow-disciples had been asleep. They appear to have been so at the time when Moses and Elias came, and Christ assumed this glorious appearance. They were suddenly awakened by the conversation and the resplendent light; opening their ears, they heard strange voices, and, opening their eyes, they were dazzled with the preternatural brightness. They listened and looked with delighted surprise. They were thrilled with ineffable joy, and spell-bound by the wonders around them.

The order of the narrative is probably this,—that Moses and Elias, having ended their conversation with Christ,

were about to retire; and Peter, anxious to detain them, said, "Master, it is good for us to be here: and let us make three tabernacles; one for thee, one for Moses, and one for Elias." It is not at all unlikely, that Peter had some vague apprehension that Christ was now about to set up that temporal kingdom, to the notion of which the disciples so fondly clung; and that Moses and Elias were come on this business. He proposed, therefore, to provide for their temporary accommodation by the erection of tabernacles. These were tents or booths, made either by fixing posts into the ground, and stretching cloth upon them, fastened by cords; or out of the branches of trees, as at the Feast of Tabernacles. They afforded temporary shelter from the sun and rain, and were not intended as permanent dwellings. Peter proposed to make such a provision for Moses, Elias, and Christ, until their arrangements were completed, and the tent should be exchanged for the palace.

Whether the proposal was made under the influence of any such consideration as this, or merely under the impulse of the moment, it was not one likely to be adopted. Could Peter suppose it probable that Moses and Elias, who had dwelt in the glory of heaven for these hundreds of years, would be willing to dwell in such rude tents as they were able to construct? Tabernacles might, indeed, do very well for fishermen of Galilee; and even the Son of Man, who sometimes had not where to lay his head, might condescend to abide under their shelter for a

season; but Moses and Elias were inhabitants of heaven, and about to return thither again.

Peter said this, because "he wist not what to say:" but, in that case, would it not have been better to have remained silent? He spake, not knowing what he said. He would have acted more wisely by holding his peace. And yet we would not contemptuously dismiss what he said, as if it were unworthy of remark, and incapable of ministering to our instruction. It was faulty; nevertheless, there was something good in it. It shows us that his heart was right, though his head was wrong; his feeling did him credit, though his judgment was in error. "Master, it is good to be here." Well might he say so. The communion of saints is blessed; and how much more must communion with *glorified* saints have been! but, above all, to be associated with these glorified saints in the presence of *glorified* Christ! No wonder that Peter was in ecstasy, and wished to prolong the rapturous joy. He knew not what to *say*, but he *felt* as he never had felt before.

"Lord, it is good to be here;
And here we would always abide."

But what made it so good to be there? The answer is, —Communion with Christ, and these glorified men. Apart from this, there was nothing either in the place or the time to be desired. They were in the solitude of a mountain-top; in the darkness of night; asleep on the

bare ground, and, probably, unprotected from the copious dews of Palestine. Travellers who have spent the night on Mount Tabor, tell us that their tents were as wet with the dew as if it had rained all night. Yet Peter, roused from his sleep on this earthy bed, says, "Lord, it is good to be here." Light from heaven was shining, voices from heaven were heard, the joys of heaven were felt; and *these things* constrained him to say, "Lord, it is good to be here."

Is there not something analogous to this in the experience of Christians now? Is not the feeling of Peter often realized in circumstances cheerless and sad? On the bed of affliction; in the humble cottage where poverty and sickness abide; at the bottom of the mine; far off on the sea; in the dismal cell where the prisoner for Christ is suffering; how often are the same words uttered, "Lord, it is good to be here!" "But," some may be ready to ask, "how is this? We can understand it in the case of Peter. If it had been our lot to be with him on Mount Tabor, we should probably have felt as he did. But in the circumstances just named, it is incomprehensible." Incomprehensible it may be, but nevertheless true.

"The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." To such an one it were hopeless to attempt explaining the paradox, "sorrowful, yet always rejoicing." And yet we

will tell him how it is, and pray God to give him "understanding." The Redeemer's gracious promise to them that love him is this: "He that loveth me shall be loved of my Father; and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him." The disciple to whom these words were spoken, could not apprehend their meaning, and inquired, "Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world? Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words; and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him." Again he says, "If any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and sup with him, and he with me."

In the gracious fulfilment of these words we have the sweetest and most enviable cause to say, "Master, it is good to be here." O it is pleasant to enjoy this manifestation of Christ, and to hold communion with him! The privilege is only inferior to that of seeing his face in the kingdom of heaven.

"His presence makes our paradise;
And where he is, is heaven."

There are many who, not being able to understand this, take the liberty of denying it altogether, or of speaking of it in the most contemptuous terms. With them the persons who profess such things are mere enthusiasts, persons of weak minds, who mistake their high-wrought feelings, and the workings of an excited imagination, for things spiritual and divine. Well, even if it were so,

what satisfactory reason can be given for breaking up the pleasant mistake? What harm is there in the happy delusion? There is confessedly a very great deal of trouble and sorrow in the world; and if help and consolation can be innocently come by, why not allow it? When it is found that the suffering Christian, in his *enthusiasm*, is so fully conscious of the Saviour's presence, feels so certain that he is in the enjoyment of spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ, and is so persuaded in his own mind that he is at the gate of heaven, as to be able, in spite of poverty, weakness, pain, and the near approach of death itself, to say, "Lord, it is good to be here,"—why should you disturb him? Is it kind to deprive him of this rich consolation? If, indeed, this *enthusiasm* operated to the injury of his general character, damaged his powers of intellect or of heart, indisposed him to duty or unfitted him for it, made him in any sense a worse friend, relation, or citizen,—then it would be right to undeceive him, to break up his illusion. But the contrary of all this is true. His Christianity improves him in every one of these respects, and gives him, over and above, in his own soul, a foretaste of heaven, in the "joy that is unspeakable, and full of glory."

But there is no mistake in this matter. "We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen." We have received, "not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are

freely given to us of God.” We feel ourselves in a position to warrant the employment of St. Peter’s own words, when we speak of the gracious manifestation of the Saviour’s presence, of our communion with him, and of our actual reception of his benefits: “We have not followed cunningly devised fables.”

This happy and hallowed communion with Christ is especially realized in the devotional exercises of the closet, in the social gatherings of Christian people, and in the public ordinances of the house of God. It is no strange thing, blessed be God! for Christian people to be so filled with the Spirit and love and joy of the Redeemer, as to be constrained to say, “Master, it is good for us to be here.”

No doubt it was very good to be there; nevertheless, Peter was wrong in wishing to remain, and the proposal he made to that effect was very foolish. He had now a glimpse of glory to cheer him; but that glimpse was never designed to make a *heaven* of Mount Tabor. Rapturous joy was given him for a while; but that joy was not intended to excuse him from laborious service in his Master’s cause. There was work to be done, trials to be endured, and battles to be fought; and he must, therefore, come down from the Mount, and enter upon the task assigned him. No doubt it is very pleasant when a traveller, faint and weary, arrives at a green and fertile spot, sits down to refresh himself, and drinks of the cooling brook. He may say, “It is good to be here.” So

it is. But there is another place to be reached; and if you remain here, you will never accomplish the journey which you have undertaken.

“It is good to be here:” so it is; but there is work to be done, important work,—work for Christ. His truth has to be distributed; his enemies overcome; his kingdom to be established. You have resources of talent, influence, property: all must be actively employed for him. The darkness which now rests upon the world, the darkness in which men go astray, and stumble into woe, this darkness must all be dispersed by you, who are “the light of the world.” Men are dying around you: go and proclaim his truth, and dispense his grace, and thus heal the sick and save the dying. His sheep are scattered on the mountains: nor home nor shepherd have they: go seek the wandering flock, and bring them to the fold. A moral waste is around you, and stretches far away beyond the range of your vision, a waste where only things rank, unsightly, and unwholesome grow: go work in it: extirpate the useless and pernicious growths; sow the good seed of the kingdom; plant trees of righteousness; work till the whole scene is changed, till the wilderness becomes a fruitful field, and the desert rejoices and blossoms as the rose.

The Prince of darkness has usurped the kingdom; he rules over the children of men; he leads them captive at his pleasure; he hurries to hell with his prey. The prey must be taken from the spoiler; the captive redeemed

from the mighty; and the dark usurper driven back to his own hell.

It is good to be with Christ on the Mount; but we cannot remain there: nor should we wish to remain, while a world is dying below. We must labour for Christ, and suffer for him, till he say, "It is enough, come up hither."

"Ah! well might the raptured disciple exclaim,
Who saw his loved Master appear,
Transfigured and robed in ethereal flame,
'It is good for us, Lord, to be here.'

"And when on the Mount of communion divine
Our souls to the Saviour draw near,
We, too, in the spirit and sentiment join,
'It is good for us, Lord, to be here.'

"O yes, and the Christian, whatever his lot,
While reading his evidence clear,—
The mount or the valley, the mansion or cot,—
Can say, 'It is good to be here.'

"By sorrow, afflictions, and troubles beset,
Temptations and trials severe,
The language of faith and of hope will be yet,
'O Lord, it is good to be here.'"

SCENE VI.

ASLEEP IN GETHSEMANE WHILE HIS MASTER PRAYS.

“THEN cometh Jesus with them unto a place called Gethsemane, and saith unto the disciples, Sit ye here, while I go and pray yonder. And he took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be sorrowful and very heavy. Then saith he unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death : tarry ye here, and watch with me. And he went a little farther, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me : nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt. And he cometh unto the disciples, and findeth them asleep, and saith unto Peter, What, could ye not watch with me one hour ? Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation : the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak. He went away again the second time, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done. And he came and found them asleep again : for their eyes were heavy.”—Matt. xxvi. 36–43.

WHAT a contrast does this scene present to the one which last engaged our attention ! That was on the mountain, this is in the valley. In that the Redeemer was seen in his glory ; in this he is overwhelmed with anguish, and casts himself on his face on the ground. Then his face shone as the sun in his strength, and his raiment was exceeding white and glistening as the light ; but now, being in an agony, he sweats, as it were, great drops of blood, falling down to the ground. On that occasion,

Moses and Elias were with him in glory ; but on this, the powers of darkness surround and afflict him. Then he and his illustrious visitants conversed about “his decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem ;” but now he pours out prayer with strong crying and tears unto Him who was able to save him.

There is a peculiar and affecting interest attached to every thing which occurred on this memorable evening,—the last evening of the Saviour’s life. It was spent chiefly in the company of his twelve Apostles. He ate the Passover with them in an upper room at Jerusalem, and immediately afterward instituted the Christian sacrament of the Lord’s supper. Having done this, he then offered up the prayer recorded in John xvii., and closed the deeply-interesting service in the upper room with the singing of a hymn. This hymn was probably the concluding part of that called the *Hallel*, or “Hymn of the Five Psalms,” usually sung at the feast of the Paschal Lamb. The five Psalms were Psalms cxiii. to cxviii. inclusive. Two of these were sung during the feast, and the other three at the close. This hymn having been sung by our Lord and his Apostles, they left the upper room, and proceeded toward the Mount of Olives. This Mount is situated on the east of Jerusalem, about a mile from the city, and separated from it by the valley of Jehoshaphat. The brook Kedron runs along the bed of this valley, and was crossed by our Saviour and his disciples on their way to Gethsemane. The Garden of

Gethsemane lay between the brook Kedron and the foot of Mount Olivet. The spot now pointed out as the scene of the Redeemer's agony is very quiet and secluded. It is adorned with some fine old olive trees, such as abounded in the days of Christ: and the Monks who have possession of the place are continually planting more. Generally, therefore, it looks now as it may have looked some eighteen hundred years ago. And although there is nothing particular to mark it as the veritable spot where the Saviour prayed, and where he so mysteriously suffered; yet, as every thing connected with it corresponds exactly with all the circumstances of the sacred narrative, we have abundant reason to believe that it is so.

To this retired spot, and the neighbourhood around it, Jesus frequently withdrew; sometimes alone, sometimes accompanied by his disciples. In the solitude of this glen he communed with God in prayer, and took the opportunity of more fully instructing his disciples in the doctrines of his kingdom, than he was able to do while surrounded with the multitudes who commonly attended on his ministry. As a favourite haunt of Christ, the Garden of Gethsemane was familiar to his disciples. "And Judas, also, which betrayed him, knew the place; for Jesus oftentimes resorted thither."

In the course of the walk from Jerusalem to Gethsemane, a deeply-interesting conversation was kept up. In this conversation the Redeemer spoke of his death as at hand; telling his disciples that he should rise again, and

go before them into Galilee. He forewarned them of the trials which were approaching, and touchingly said, "All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad."

In reply to this affectionate and faithful warning, Peter once more exhibits the impulsiveness of his nature. There can be no question that he was truly and strongly attached to Christ; and he felt surprised and grieved, if not indignant, that he should be thought capable of forsaking or denying the Lord whom he loved. He said, therefore, promptly and with great warmth, "Though all shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended. Jesus said unto him, Verily, I say unto thee, that this night, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice." Peter answered this with still greater earnestness of manner; he spake the more vehemently, declaring that he was ready to go to prison with his Master; and finished by saying, "If I should die with thee, I will not deny thee in any wise." No one doubted that poor Peter was sincere in all this. He spoke as he felt at the moment, and meant all he said; but, as the sequel proved, he was over-confident: he trusted in himself, and failed in a melancholy manner.

Shortly after arriving at Gethsemane, Christ took Peter and James and John apart from the other disciples, and retired with them into a still more secluded part of the Garden. The same three are thus chosen to be witnesses

of the agony of Christ, as they had previously beheld his glorious transfiguration. And while we would not curiously pry into things which are not revealed, we must suppose that there was some special reason for this selection: and may we venture to suggest, that perhaps only they who had seen Christ in his glory were qualified to endure the sight of his anguish? But for what purpose did Christ take these three with him? The answer is, that they might “watch” with him. The word rendered “watch,” signifies *to be wakeful—on the alert—guarded against danger*. Probably it may also mean in this place, that these three were to sympathize with Christ. Suffering and danger which would involve both him and them were at hand, and he calls them to a devout preparation; he directs them to unite with him in seeking divine support, that so they might be fortified against the coming trial.

Having thus instructed them, he withdrew from them a short distance; St. Luke says, “about a stone’s cast; and kneeled down,” and fell on his face, “and prayed.” It has been beautifully observed,* that it is not without instructive meaning to us, that the body of the disciples were kept at a distance, and even the favoured three who accompanied our Lord were oppressed with sleep, and witnessed not all the particulars which were afterwards very generally and briefly revealed, in order to their being

* Richard Watson.

recorded. Imagination may, indeed, be busy here; but imagination must be reined in by humility and sobriety; for we are at a distance while our Lord prays and agonizes “yonder;” and as a veil is thrown over all but the prominent passages of this wondrous scene, human imagination has no light to dispel the darkness, and probably always perverts where she pretends to discover.

To some of our readers a caution like this will probably be unnecessary. A delicate sense of Christian propriety will confine them within the limits of the Evangelists’ simple and touching account; or an exquisitely sensitive nervous temperament will prevent them from attempting to do more than take a distant view of the mournful and mysterious scene. In reading the Gospel narrative, they will receive a general impression of some fearful and indescribable agony as endured by Christ; but even if the wish to know more than appears on the surface of the record should arise, they will feel that they have not nerve enough to conduct a searching and minute examination of the several terms employed. We will only say, that these terms are most emphatic; they are charged with a woful meaning, the measure of which it is impossible for us to ascertain. They imply that Christ was penetrated with anguish; that he felt himself oppressed with a load which was insupportable; and that the sensation of grief and pain and conflict was so keen and overpowering, as to threaten the extinction of life. “My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death.”

But, full of meaning as these words are, they are not so expressive of the Redeemer's agony as were his own actions in this hour of sorrow. Full many a time he had prayed in this place before; but O! he never prayed as now. A mortal anguish wrung his supplications from him with strong crying and tears. He kneeled down to pray, but the strength of his emotions bowed him to the ground, and he lay prostrate on the damp cold earth. The solemn stillness of night in Gethsemane had never been disturbed by such sounds before. Man never suffered as Christ suffered now: man could not, and live.

“The circumstance added by St. Luke, still more strongly than the language employed, powerfully emphatic as it is, marks the intenseness of Christ's inward struggle. In the human nature he derived strength from the ministry of an angel; and then, ‘being in an agony, he prayed more earnestly,’ as though the strength thus imparted was but renewed strength to suffer, and ‘his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground.’ Even if we adopt the opinion, that a mere comparison of the profuse and heavy sweat to clots of blood was intended, this itself, considering that there was no bodily exertion to produce it, and that the time was night, when the heat of the day had passed, could not have been produced but by the strongest conflict and commotion of spirit. But unless more was intended, it is difficult to conceive why clotted blood should have been fixed upon as an illustration of the rolling down of great drops of sweat.

It is certainly unusual, and, to any one who attempts to compare the one with the other, will appear inapt. It is not, however, necessary to suppose that this sweat was altogether a profusion of blood, which is the error some have fallen into on the other side. And though some heathen writers have been quoted by the critics who mention bloody sweats, and a modern instance or two of this, as the effect of the strong emotion of fear, has been given, all that can fairly be understood by these accounts is, that by a rupture of some of the finer blood-vessels in some parts of the body, the sweat became tinged, and, to a certain extent, bloody. This is probably what Galen means in the passage quoted by Dr. Mead: ‘*Continere interdum, poros ex multo aut fervido spiritu usque adeo dilatari, ut etiam exeat sanguis per eos, fiatque sudor sanguineus.*’ Thuanus, too, in his History, having mentioned an Italian gentleman thrown into great horror of a public execution, says, ‘*Observatum, tam indignæ mortis vehementi metu adeo concussum animo eum fuisse, ut sanguineum sudorem toto corpore fundaret.*’ But whatever may be thought of these extraordinary cases, in the instance of our Lord, the most natural inference from the words of the Evangelist is, that his profuse and heavy perspiration was thus tinged with blood which had burst from the smaller vessels, so that ‘his sweat was ὡσεὶ, like great drops of blood falling down to the ground.’ So that not only was the perspiration, but blood also, forced out by the conflict within.”

With respect to the cause or causes of this unparalleled agony of Christ, it is, perhaps, impossible for us to arrive at any thing beyond a probable conjecture. At the same time it may be observed, that some of those which have been assigned are so manifestly insufficient to account for the effect described, as to make it surprising that grave and learned men should have entertained the thought of them for a moment. Others of them imply so much that is opposed to just and worthy views of the character and work of Christ, as to dispose us at once indignantly to dismiss them. The treachery of Judas; the cowardice of his Apostles; the ingratitude of the Jews; the terrible calamities in which his death would involve his country; the fear of death; the vivid apprehension of the ignominy and torture which he was shortly to undergo; the prospect of being forsaken on the cross by his Father; the terrific onset of the powers of darkness, with a view to shake his constancy, and deter him from the redeeming work which he had undertaken: these, and other causes besides, have been assigned as accounting for the Saviour's anguish. But why should we attribute this excruciating suffering to any one cause exclusively? Is it not more likely that there was a combination of causes at work? and that there was a *rush* of feeling from every quarter? His situation, his approaching death, the temptations of the enemy, the awful penalty due to sin, the justice of God arrayed against him as the sinner's substitute: may we not suppose that all these

conspired together to produce the grief, terror, consternation, and anguish of this awful hour?

But especially we must bear in mind his substitutional character. "Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows:" "the chastisement of our peace was upon him," Before the infinite justice of God, he stood as in the sinner's place; and suffered, "the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God." The language of Holy Scripture warrants us in saying, that the heaviest of the Saviour's sufferings were directly inflicted by the hand of God. "Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him; he hath put him to grief." In this one brief sentence is expressed the mystery of an infinite love, and of an inconceivable suffering. That bruising of the Redeemer's soul began in Gethsemane, and was consummated on the cross. Not the body only suffers for sin: the penalty is inflicted on the soul as well. The suffering of Christ in the Garden was in his soul; the body only suffered in the way of sympathy, being affected by the intense anguish of the mind. He was drinking now the cup of bitterness,—drinking it for us,—that we might drink the cup of life and salvation.

This much concerning the Saviour's sufferings in Gethsemane; let us now listen to his prayer. "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me." These words were repeated three times,—repeated with an intensity of fervour and desire which we cannot conceive. The supplication was urged, as we are informed in the

Epistle to the Hebrews, "with strong crying and tears." The Redeemer prayed for relief; he prayed for a mitigation of his anguish;—he prayed that, if it were possible, if it might harmonize with the Divine Wisdom, if it were consistent with the appointment of God, if the design of his incarnation might be accomplished without his drinking the dregs of this bitter cup;—he prayed that, in that case, the cup might pass from him.

But it is asked, Why, if he was divine as well as human, did he require to pray for this relief? Why did not his divine nature sustain him in the hour of his trial? The answer is, that, while he was truly human, and truly divine, "God with us," "God manifest in the flesh," the human nature was sustained in an ordinary way, and not by any immediate application of the sources of the divine. When the man Christ Jesus was hungry, he ate bread; when he was thirsty, he drank; and when he was wearied, he sat down to rest, or sought repose in sleep. So here; when he is suffering in body and in mind, he takes precisely the same course as all his suffering saints are called to take. He prays to God, in the time of his trial, for support and deliverance. In this also he has left us an example. Our refuge is in God. We appeal to him in our time of need; and our hope is, that he will listen to and answer our earnest and believing prayer.

But it must be carefully observed, that while this prayer was earnestly and repeatedly offered up, there was, at the same time, the most perfect and cheerful acqui-

essence in the divine will. “Nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt.” The good desired is plainly asked for,—asked for again and again; but the earnest petitioner closes with the expression of entire and cordial submission to him to whom the petition is addressed: “Not as I will, but as thou wilt.” This prayer to him “who was able to save him from death,” was graciously heard; as St. Paul, in writing to the Hebrews, distinctly affirms. And, in the narrative itself, we have evidence of the fact that the Saviour’s prayer was answered. “There appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him.” He rose from the earth, and rejoined his disciples. He spoke to them with his usual calmness, and peacefully awaited the approach of his enemies. The dark hour was past; his grief was assuaged; the whirlwind was hushed, and mental quietude was restored.

The behaviour of Christ in the Garden is replete with instruction and encouragement to his disciples, amidst all the circumstances of difficulty and distress in which they may be involved. They are here effectually taught, that it is their privilege “in *every thing*, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, to make known their requests unto God;” and to do so in the assured confidence that he will graciously listen to the voice of their crying. In our prayers to God we are not limited to things that are spiritual. These are, indeed, of higher importance and value than things temporal, and may, therefore, be more frequently and earnestly prayed for; but all things requi-

site and necessary, as well for the body as the soul, may be legitimately brought to the throne of grace. Food and raiment, home and friends, health and life, may all be asked of God. Privation and pain, sickness, bereavement, and death, are all things from which human nature shrinks. Nor is that shrinking sinful. It is one of the instincts of our being, and we lawfully carry its expression to the throne of the Heavenly Grace. The God whose we are, and whom we serve,—the Father in heaven, who loves us with a father's love,—graciously permits his children to ask of him food to eat, and raiment to put on, and a home to dwell in. It is not wrong to desire, in prayer, that he would supply my need, relieve my pain, recover me from sickness, screen me from danger, prosper me in my worldly business, continue to me my friends, and deliver me from death. Nor will he chide me if I pray with earnestness for these things, and repeat my prayer. Indeed, all prayer, for whatsoever good, should be earnest and importunate. The prayer that is not so, proceeds from one who either does not highly value that for which he prays, or is not very anxious to obtain it. And, in either case, it is not to be wondered at, if the thing desired is withheld for a season, or altogether denied.

But while we thus maintain that every thing which concerns our personal safety or comfort may be earnestly and importunately prayed for, we must not overlook the indispensable condition, "Not as I will, but as thou wilt."

There are reasons for this submission to the divine will in our case, which did not exist in the case of our divine Redeemer. He never sinned; but we are vile. Our many and aggravated sins testify against us; they declare, with incontrovertible truth, that we are utterly unworthy to receive any one of the things for which we pray. We have no right—we can have no right—to any good; all is forfeited, and for ever. And, even if this were not so, there is another reason for our praying with submission such as our Lord expressed; and that is, we are not competent to judge whether the thing prayed for is really needed by us, or would be a good to us. We often mistake our own character, and the actual necessities of our particular position. It behoves us, therefore, to refer ourselves and our petition to the wisdom and the goodness of God. His knowledge is perfect; and we are sure, that such is his love, that he will certainly do the best thing possible for us. He has condescended to assure his people that he will withhold no good thing from them; and we ought to be willing that he should be the judge as to whether this particular thing for which we are now praying is a good thing for us,—a good thing for us at present, and under existing circumstances. It is easy enough to see, that a thing may be good in itself, which yet would not be good for me, or not good for me at the present time. On all these accounts, nothing can be more seemly, or more necessary, or even advantageous, than such cheerful and complete resignation to the will

of God, as is so instructively and affectingly exhibited in this example of Christ.

These remarks apply chiefly to prayer for temporal things. There is an important difference between these, and things spiritual. The latter are absolutely and in every case essential. Without them, we are for ever undone. For example: we are guilty, and pardon is indispensable; we must either receive pardon, or suffer punishment. Again: we are unholy; and must either be renewed in righteousness, or else be excluded from heaven. Mercy to pardon, and grace to renew, are thus essential; and, as such, it is our happiness to find that they are specifically and repeatedly promised. Provided, therefore, we pray for these in the way prescribed, our receiving them is divinely certain. It is not necessary, with respect to them, that there should be added, "Not as I will, but as thou wilt." The will of God is clearly expressed. The things are absolutely required, and unequivocally promised, and may therefore be most confidently asked.

But in the case of things temporal, it is altogether different. The sickness under which I am now labouring was permitted for my benefit, or for the benefit of those around me; and, perhaps, the end proposed could not be secured by the use of any other means. The loved one of my heart is apparently about to be taken away from me: and it is right enough that I should pray to be exempted from this bereavement. But perhaps I am in danger of

idolatrously fixing my affections on this loved one; and, to save me from idolatry, he or she is removed as with a stroke. I desire health, but perhaps sickness is better: friends, but perhaps I shall be weaned more effectually from earth to heaven, if they are taken away. I pray for life; but possibly I am more fully prepared for death now than I shall be found hereafter, and it is better, therefore, to die. All things are known to Him with whom we have to do. He sees the end from the beginning. He knoweth whereof we are made. He is acquainted with every spring of thought and of feeling; and can determine exactly what will be the influence of this or that circumstance upon our gracious principle. And all this perfect knowledge, on the part of Almighty God, is connected with the tenderest love; and I am thus assured that he will do, in answer to my prayer, what, on the whole, will be most for my advantage. With these facts before me, it would be manifestly foolish, not to say wicked, for me to urge my prayer in any other spirit than that which Christ displayed in this example: "Nevertheless, not my will, but thy will, be done."

We have a famous instance, in the case of ancient Israel, of the consequence of urging prayer in any other spirit than this. Their petition was peremptorily and importunately urged. They desired a King to reign over them, and to go out with them to battle; they sought, in this respect, to be on an equal footing with the Pagan nations around them. Alas for them! They occupied a much

superior position; but they did not think so. God was their King; and he told them that, by urging this prayer, they, in fact, rejected him. But nothing would satisfy them,—only a King. At length God gave them their desire. He listened to their urgent prayer; and sent them what they asked for. This, however, he did in his wrath. They had greatly offended him by this request; and all the more so, as he had warned them of the consequences, and shown them the manner of the King that should reign over them. Their folly and wickedness, in persisting in this offensive and hurtful petition, were thus all the more aggravated: “And he gave them their request, but sent leanness into their soul.”

One remark more on this subject, and we have done. God can very easily send a gracious answer to our prayer, while, at the same time, he does not give us the identical thing for which we pray: he can give us more and better in another form. Take the instance of St. Paul, praying to be delivered from the thorn in the flesh. Like his Lord, he urged his prayer earnestly and repeatedly: “For this thing,” says he, “I besought the Lord thrice that it might depart from me.” His prayer was answered; but not in the thing for which he prayed. The answer was, “My grace is sufficient for thee; for my strength is made perfect in weakness.” And this answer was perfectly satisfactory to the Apostle; as much so as if the very thing he asked for had been given him,—perhaps, even more so. “Most gladly, therefore, will I rather glory in

my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me."

We pass away, then, from the contemplation of Christ in his agony, and of his instructive deportment while enduring it. May the lessons which both are so admirably adapted to teach be learned by us all! And now that we turn to a consideration of the conduct of the chosen three who witnessed this mysterious and distressing scene, we shall probably find this part of the sacred narrative equally calculated to convey to us important lessons and salutary admonitions.

Peter, James, and John, were selected by Christ to witness his agony,—to watch with him, and to engage in prayer. Probably, if the Evangelists had left us without information as to the manner in which these three disciples conducted themselves, we should have felt no difficulty in arriving at the conclusion that they watched and prayed, as they had been desired. It is so natural to suppose that they would deeply sympathize with their beloved Master,—that they would be, in every respect, alive to his sorrowful position,—profoundly moved by the sight of his mysterious anguish; and, while they could not relieve the suffering, they would affectionately lend the sufferer their countenance and prayer; mindful of his words, and with intense desire for his relief, they would watch with him. All this was to be expected; and, apart from the direct information of the Evangelists, all this would probably have been concluded.

No man would have been listened to for a moment who would have ventured to argue for the probability that they fell asleep. He would have been thought asleep, and dreaming too.

And yet, alas for human nature ! and alas for the pretensions of the frail ones of earth ! the thing we should so naturally have expected the disciples to do, was the very thing they did not ; and that which we should have thought the most improbable of all, was the very thing they did : they fell asleep. We find that, during the intervals of time elapsing between the several presentations of our Saviour's prayer, he came to his disciples, and found them sleeping. Again and again he wakened them ; but as often they fell asleep, "for their eyes were heavy." This part of the account deserves our most careful consideration ; and, while it may serve to humble us, by showing how frail we are, it may greatly edify us with its salutary truth.

Jesus said to them, "Tarry ye here, and watch with me." This injunction implied, at least, that they should keep awake ; and we cannot doubt that they were able to do so. It was their duty to keep awake. No blame could attach to them for sleeping, if to keep awake had been impracticable. The duty might be difficult,—under the circumstances, perhaps, it might be extremely difficult ; but still it was practicable. Christ would not have enjoined them to watch, if the fact that it was night,—that they were exhausted, overcharged with sorrow, and

the subjects of special Satanic influences,—had rendered watching impossible. Whatever Christ commands to be done, is our duty, and may be accomplished. The duties which he enjoins are to be fulfilled in a strength superior to our own,—a strength divine, and, therefore, all-sufficient. On this principle, we maintain that the thing which Christ commands, though physically impossible, becomes graciously easy; and that whatever difficulty may be alleged in the case of the disciples, in reference to their keeping awake, they were under obligation to do so, and deserving of blame for having slept

Beside, one would have supposed that there was every thing in their situation to keep them wakeful; and that, in point of fact, the difficulty would have been in going to sleep. With respect to Christ,—the Master whom they so fondly loved,—he was in circumstances of extraordinary mental excitement and suffering; and he had solicited their sympathy, and brought them here for the very purpose: “Tarry ye here, and watch with me.” And with respect to themselves, they had been distinctly and repeatedly told that trials were at hand: they had been warned of dangers which would overtake them this very night; that their enemies would shortly be upon them; and that, altogether, they would, in a few hours at the farthest, try their attachment to Christ and his cause, as it had not been tried before. Nor, be it observed, were these intimations made to them at some distant time. Not an hour had elapsed since they had received these warnings.

On the way to this place, while walking from Jerusalem to Gethsemane, (and the distance was only about a mile,) this had been the subject of conversation. The warnings had not been vaguely given; and the lapse of time had not permitted them to be forgotten. Tell a man, that to-night the civil authorities will send to apprehend him,—that to-night the enemies who are plotting his downfall and ruin will be upon him in overpowering strength,—that to-night the loved one of his heart will be taken away from him,—and would you not expect that, if he believed your telling, he would keep awake? If you found him asleep, would you not be ready to conclude, either that he did not believe what you had told him; or that he thought lightly, and was altogether careless, of the evils you had indicated; or that he was so confident of his ability to meet and overcome the evils, and so absolutely assured of the sufficiency of his resources, as to feel himself in perfect safety?

Now, if we apply any one of these conclusions, with a view to explain the sleep of the disciples on this occasion, we establish the fact of their culpability. If they did not believe in the trial and danger of which Christ had so plainly warned them, they were guilty of a grave offence, and one for which no justification can be offered. If they under-estimated or thought lightly of the danger Christ had pointed out, it was an assumption of superior judgment to that of their gracious Master, and a serious reflection upon him for having needlessly alarmed them.

Or, lastly, if they over-estimated their courage and resources, it showed an ignorance of themselves, and a degree of vanity, which it were scarcely possible to remove or to correct otherwise than by a disastrous failure. In any case, therefore, it was their folly and their sin not to watch and pray when Christ told them to do so; and especially when he had not only prescribed their duty, but also condescended to explain to them the reason of that duty, and the many important considerations which combined to prove that this was a wise and necessary course. With all these facts before us, we cannot refrain from censuring the disciples for having fallen asleep.

But their apologists are prepared to urge, in their behalf, that it was night; that they were exhausted with the journeyings and engagements of the day; and that, in fact, they fell asleep from being overcharged with sorrow. St. Luke says, that the Saviour came, and “found them sleeping for sorrow.” We would give all due weight to these suggestions. And, especially, it behoves us to ponder carefully the statement of St. Luke: the disciples were “sleeping for sorrow.” These words unquestionably imply that their sleep arose from their sorrow. Their sorrow and their sleep are here evidently put as cause and effect. As for their sorrow, it was what we might look for on the occasion; and it evidenced a right state of feeling on the part of the Apostles. And as the sleep into which they fell was the natural effect of this very sorrow, which you admit was creditable to their hearts, can we

suppose there was any culpability in their falling asleep? Can they, with any show of fairness, be blamed for that which arose naturally out of their sorrow for the sufferings of a beloved Master? Instead of reckoning their sleep an indication of their want of sympathy with Christ, is it not put in by St. Luke as conclusive evidence of that sympathy? Was not their sleep, therefore, rather to their credit than otherwise?

Questions of this sort are perfectly in order: they arise naturally out of the words of St. Luke, and in connexion with the grave animadversions on this part of the disciples' conduct, contained in the preceding paragraphs. To all these questions, however, there is one general answer; an answer, to our own apprehension, perfectly conclusive. The questions thus raised are intended to exculpate the disciples, to free them from all blame; and the general answer is, that Christ did not so exculpate them. He blamed them; he expostulates with them on the impropriety of their conduct, and reproves them. Where Christ reproves, let no man seek to justify. The truth is, that the words of St. Luke are an explanation of the fact on physical principles, but not a justification of it on religious grounds. There are many things done, in the course of a man's life, which you can easily enough account for, but which, nevertheless, you cannot justify. For example, a Christian man falls from grace; falls foully into sin. You have known him long and well. You understand his turn of mind, and are, perhaps, fully

acquainted with the weak point in his character. You understand clearly the peculiarity of the position in which he has been placed. You know the special temptations to which he has been exposed. You are acquainted with the adverse influences surrounding him, and operating upon the peculiarities of his mental and moral constitution. So familiar have you been with all these, that you have almost calculated upon his fall from the beginning ; and, now that it has actually occurred, you are not in the least degree surprised. You are able to comprehend at once the whole process which has been worked out in this disastrous issue. But, while you pity him,—and you ought to do that,—would you exonerate him from all blame? Would you justify his conduct? Would you disconnect all idea of guilt from his fall? No, no ; you would not, could not, do so. If you believe in the promised guidance, upholding, and guardianship of Almighty God, you must believe that he fell through his own fault.

So here, you may account for the fact that the disciples slept ; but it is quite another thing to justify that sleep, and to free them from all blame. Without supposing, as some have done, that the disciples were now, as well as their Master, subjected to special influences from the powers of darkness, it may be observed, that their sleep admits of an easy physical explanation. One of the ordinary effects of excessive grief is a disposition to sleep. The natural course of the circulation is interfered with ;

the brain becomes overcharged and compressed; and heaviness, stupor, and sleep result. Dr. Rush, in his work on Diseases of the Mind, remarks, "There is another symptom of grief which is not often noticed, and that is *profound sleep*. I have often witnessed it, even in mothers immediately after the death of a child." Many examples illustrative of this might easily be adduced, were it necessary. We will, therefore, assume that this explanation is received; and then the only question which may be fairly raised is, whether the disciples were in circumstances to guard against and overcome this physical effect of sudden and intense grief. There cannot be a moment's hesitation in answering this question in the affirmative. The disciples were told that this was a time for special prayer; and, had they united with Christ in prayer, as he instructed them to do, they would have received grace in this their time of need. The Redeemer said, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death:" their sorrow was unspeakably less than his; and, if they had done as he did, and as he told them to do,—pray,—they would have been succoured as truly as he was. "There appeared an angel unto him from heaven, strengthening him." We dare not say, indeed, that an angel would have been sent to strengthen them; nor was that required; but it may be safely affirmed that, somehow or other, God would have sustained them in this hour of their sorrow, and kept them from the error into which they fell. Had they obeyed Christ, and duly improved the season of

opportunity, they would not only have been kept from sleeping, but their minds would have been prepared for, and fortified against, the trials and dangers which were at hand. Instead of this, they gave themselves up to helpless grief, and slept till the hour for prayer was past, and the trial had actually come upon them.

On the whole, therefore, it appears that it was the duty of the disciples to watch, because Christ had commanded it. It was practicable for them to do so; for Christ is not a hard Master: he does not make that any man's duty which the man is not, somehow or other, competent to do. Their sleeping was all the more inexcusable, as Christ had not only commanded them to keep awake, but had also explained to them the many reasons there were for doing so; and this hour of watching and prayer was expressly intended to prepare them for, and qualify them to rise above, the dangers and sorrows just at hand. It was, therefore, both foolish and dangerous to neglect the warning, and to sleep, instead of watching unto prayer. This summary view of the whole case will enable us to understand precisely in what way their sleep, although the effect of a natural cause, was reprehensible. There was a gracious remedy against it: they neglected this remedy; and their sleep was their sin.

Hitherto our remarks have been upon the general subject of the disciples sleeping; we must now have more particular reference to Peter. There were peculiarities in his case, which made it far stranger for him to sleep, than

for either James or John to do so. It was culpable in them, but more manifestly so in him.

“He cometh unto the disciples, and findeth them asleep, and saith unto Peter, What, could ye not watch with me one hour?” Peter is singled out from his companions; and the pointed question thus put to him plainly implies that such conduct in him was most surprising and reprehensible. It was so, inasmuch as he had been warned, not only in common with the other disciples, but specially and individually. Christ had, so to speak, taken special pains with Peter to make him fully understand the critical circumstances in which he was placed. Christ had repeatedly addressed to him the most earnest and affectionate admonitions. To all this Peter had replied by a declaration of his strong and unalterable attachment, and of his fixed determination to abide all hazards in standing by Christ and his cause. He had professed in the strongest terms his readiness to suffer imprisonment or death rather than forsake his Lord. And surely, after all this, we might reasonably expect to find Peter serious and guarded, careful and devout. The very professions he had made, and which could not yet have passed from his recollection, it might be thought, would help to preserve him, by making him feel that his character was at stake. He had professed more, and more would be expected of him. But, alas for him! he was strong in himself; he trusted to his own heart, and sadly failed. The Saviour asks him to watch

with him ; and the request is scarcely made before Peter falls asleep. The Master, whom he professes so ardently to love, for whom he is ready to be imprisoned or to lay down his life, is now in the deepest distress, and requests of Peter an hour's sympathy. But Peter sleeps. The Redeemer prays, being in an agony,—prays as he never had prayed before : but Peter prays not with him ; he sleeps. Dangers are thickening around him ; the enemies are at hand ; the storm has gathered, and is ready to burst upon him ; but what recks Peter of all this ? He sleeps. Satan comes, with subtlety and malignant power ; the purpose of his coming has been specified ; he comes to sift Peter as wheat is sifted : but what of that ? Peter sleeps. He is wakened up time and again ; but waking and warning are alike in vain : he sleeps. Peter thought he could do great things ; but he fails in little things. He could suffer imprisonment ; but he could not pray for an hour. He could lay down his life ; but he could not keep awake.

Once more the Saviour addresses Peter ; but it is to tell him that the hour is past : the opportunity for prayer and preparation is ended. “ Sleep on now, and take your rest ; behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners.” Duty has been neglected, opportunity lost, prayer restrained ; and now that the storm has burst, Peter finds himself unprepared, and his confidence, resolution, and attachment are swept away by the blast.

Let us not, however, in a just reprehension of Peter

and his fellow-disciples, lose sight of ourselves. Let us not overlook the fact, that our own conduct has been in so many instances unworthy, and very different from what might have been looked for. The returns which we have made to the Lord Jesus, for all the benefits of his love, have been most meagre and unsatisfactory. In a thousand instances we have been unmindful of his interests, and heedless of his warnings. He has shown us his will, and we have followed our own. He has called us to work; and, though we have said, "We go, Lord," we have remained where we were, and unemployed. He has discovered to us, at some particular time, his interests in jeopardy; but we moved not to the rescue. We might have spread his truth, sustained his cause, enlarged his kingdom, and advanced his glory; but we have miserably failed; and our failure has been aggravated by unnumbered blessings of the richest value on the one hand, and by large professions of attachment, interest, and purpose, on the other. If we had received little from him, little would have been looked for in return: if we had made less profession, our shortcomings and failure would have been the less observed. We have been too much like Peter; and well may the Saviour say to us, as he said to him, "What, could ye not watch with me one hour?"

It is the business of all the disciples, whatever their station in life, and whatever the means at their disposal, to sympathize with Christ in his great and merciful design to illuminate and renew the world, and to restore

to mankind the happiness which sin had driven from them. It is their duty, as it is their highest privilege, to take part with him in labours for the salvation of men. They are called to unite their prayers with his for the speedy coming of his spiritual kingdom. But while all these things are perfectly clear as matters of duty and privilege, as constituting a service to which he is most justly entitled, and which we have vowed again and again to render him, what have been the facts of the case? Talents have been buried in the earth; we have slumbered at our posts; and while the prayers of our great High Priest above have been unceasing, ours have been interrupted by the most trifling occurrences. O what long intervals there have been, during which the world of perishing men has been forgotten, and the prayer, "Thy kingdom come," has been coldly and dreamily uttered! The good seed of the kingdom has been sown; but instead of watching with intense interest for the growth of it, as we ought to have done, we have slept, and, while we were sleeping, the enemy came and sowed his tares. The foe has been at the gate, mustered in full strength: he has been there with all the resources of his subtlety, malignity, and power; the cause of Christ has been in peril: but we have slept instead of watching, and the citadel has been taken.

Shall we look to a period not very remote,—say, a hundred years ago? There was then a very dark world; untold millions of perishing men,—men for whom the

Saviour died,—men for whose illumination the Gospel was given,—men for whose deliverance from the god of this world Christ had unceasingly prayed, for whose salvation he had unweariedly concerned himself; but might he not have said then, as he said on another occasion, “Of the people there was none to help me?” The church was asleep. The sighs and groans of dying millions no more affected her, than did the strong crying and tears of the suffering Saviour affect his disciples in Gethsemane.

But let us not lose ourselves in a crowd. Let the question be proposed to each one of us, Who among us has not slept,—slept when he should have prayed, rested when he should have toiled, been at ease and in security when danger was at hand? The tramp of approaching enemies might have been expected to keep us wakeful; but we have slept. The time for slumber is past. A glorious awakening has taken place among the churches, and the Saviour’s work is being accomplished. His truth is spreading in the earth. His kingdom is coming. The world will be saved. While the church is labouring, believing, and praying, there are bright hopes for mankind. O may she never again be found, like Peter, asleep in Gethsemane while the Master prays!

“What I say unto you,” said Christ, “I say unto all, Watch.” *We* need to be exhorted to this duty as much as *they* did: for although we may not be exposed to the *same kind of danger* as that to which they were exposed,

there are other dangers which surround and threaten us, and against which it is as necessary we should be prayerfully guarded. We are every day more or less liable to be influenced by things adverse to our purity and peace. On any morning of our lives we may fairly reckon upon meeting with something in the course of the day, more or less calculated to affect our spiritual interests. A stumbling-block may be in our way, a difficulty may arise to discourage us, or an enemy seeking to oppose our progress may appear. As we move along in the path of duty, we find that here a snare has been laid for our feet, and there something has been placed to allure us from truth and love. Unless, therefore, we "watch and pray," we shall inevitably "enter into temptation." However sincerely resolved we may be to mind our duty, and not to be turned aside or hindered by any thing that may occur, we shall find that true with reference to ourselves, which was spoken of the disciples : "The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." The weakness of the flesh was not adverted to for the purpose of excusing their carelessness, but as showing the great reason for vigilance. "*Watch,*" lest you should be taken by surprise ; "*pray,*" lest your weakness be overcome.

SCENE VII.

BY THE FIRE IN THE HALL OF THE HIGH PRIEST'S PALACE.

“BUT Peter followed him afar off unto the High Priest’s palace, and went in, and sat with the servants, to see the end. Now Peter sat without in the palace: and a damsel came unto him, saying, Thou also wast with Jesus of Galilee. But he denied before them all, saying, I know not what thou sayest. And when he was gone out into the porch, another maid saw him, and said unto them that were there, This fellow was also with Jesus of Nazareth. And again he denied with an oath, I do not know the man. And after a while came unto him they that stood by, and said to Peter, Surely thou also art one of them; for thy speech bewrayeth thee. Then began he to curse and to swear, saying, I know not the man. And immediately the cock crew. And Peter remembered the word of Jesus, which said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice. And he went out, and wept bitterly.”—Matt. xxvi. 58, 69–75.

THERE was a time in the history of King David when he thought that his troubles were all past and gone, his long-continued and anxious toils were ended, the period of rest had come, and he should toil no more. The last difficulty is surmounted, and the last danger has disappeared. He has risen superior to opposition and trial, temptation and discouragement, and he feels himself entitled to repose in the results. Laurels encircle his brow, and strength is under his feet. He returns in

triumph from the well-fought field, and peace sets in, to be disturbed no more. "I shall never be moved," said he; "thou hast made my mountain to stand strong."

But alas for him! how soon he discovered his mistake, and was constrained to add, "Thou didst hide thy face, and I was troubled!" He found that his confidence of security and strength was premature. The tone of triumph in which he indulged belongs not to a changeful and probationary state like this. Not till mortality is swallowed up of life, and earth is changed for heaven, may we sing, "My mountain so strong, I shall never be moved."

A similar mistake to that of David was made by Peter. In the clearness of his convictions of the truth, in the sincerity of his attachment to Christ, and in the strength and fixedness of his resolution, he felt himself absolutely invulnerable. Nothing should alter his sense of duty, or abate the ardour of his love, or separate between him and his beloved Master. He had made up his mind; he had chosen his ground; and now, come weal or woe, he will abide with Christ, and share his fortune. Sorrowfully the Redeemer spoke to his disciples, and said, "All ye shall be offended because of me this night." The bare idea of forsaking Christ roused Peter's indignation; and he protested, saying, "Though all shall be offended, yet will not I." "If I should die with thee, I will not deny thee in any wise." "Simon, Simon," said Christ to him, "Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not:

and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren." But this affectionate and earnest warning was ineffectual. Peter only replied the more vehemently, "Lord, I am ready to go with thee, both into prison, and to death."

In all this unquestionably Peter was sincere. He spoke as he felt; he meant all he said, and fully intended to make it good. But the result shows, that either he over-estimated his faith and courage and love; or else, as seems, indeed, more probable, his confidence was in these, rather than in the grace and guardianship of God. Nor does Peter stand alone in this respect; there are many of us like him, strong in ourselves, and strong untried. It behoves us all to be jealous of our own hearts, and to judge charitably in the case of others. If we see a brother or a sister fall, we should pity, and be afflicted, and mourn; but at the same time we should feel ourselves admonished, lest there should be in us "an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God." This man has fallen under the power of temptation, fallen into sin; but how do I know, if the same temptation had assailed me, that I should have more successfully resisted? "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall."

We have given Peter credit for sincerity, and we must not fail to give him credit for courage also. He was armed, and ready to employ his weapon, in the face of any danger, for the defence of Christ. Look at him in the Garden of Gethsemane, and you will see that he is prepared to do battle with the enemies of his Lord. He

fears no man, and boldly faces an overwhelming force. A band of Roman soldiers has arrived, for the purpose of apprehending Christ: officers from the Chief Priests accompany them, and a multitude of all sorts of persons, with all sorts of offensive weapons. But Peter draws his sword in the face of all, and courageously opens the fight: "He smote the High Priest's servant, and cut off his right ear." And he was only restrained from further attempts in this line by the address of Christ: "Put up thy sword into the sheath: the cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?"

The courage of Peter (perhaps it may be thought to have degenerated into rashness) was, under the circumstances, altogether out of place. The evils which Christ had foretold, and which had now actually overtaken them, were not to be met by physical force, but to be endured in the strength of grace. Peter ought to have prayed for that grace, while in the Garden of Gethsemane; but, instead of doing so, he slept; and the consequence is, that he now finds himself compelled to draw upon his own resources in the time of need: he falls back upon his natural courage, instead of trusting in the strength and protection of God.

This drawing of his sword is to be regarded as an important indication of the state of Peter's mind; and it will materially help us to unfold the secret of his mournful fall. It clearly shows us where he had placed his confidence; and that his hopes lay in himself, and in his own good qualities. He felt that he was able to meet the

conflict, and he expected victory by the might of his own right hand. Christ immediately undeceived him ; telling him at once, plainly and fully, that this was not the spirit in which present trials were to be met ; these carnal weapons, these merely human resources, would not avail against the enemy ; and that he must entirely cease from them. “ Put up thy sword into the sheath.” Peter had neglected to improve the opportunity afforded him for having his mind fortified by the grace of God, and for securing spiritual aid from above ; and being now positively interdicted by Christ from the use of ordinary weapons of defence, he feels himself exposed and helpless in the presence of the enemy, and with the immediate prospect of greater and overwhelming trials. A complete and most unfavourable reaction takes place in his mind ; a change passes over him ; he is shorn of his strength ; the armour wherein he trusted slips from his grasp ; and, in the sight of accumulating trials and an infuriated mob, he becomes weak as other men. Doubt takes the place of confidence, and courage is supplanted by fear. The very next thing we are told about him, proves this : “ Peter followed afar off.”

In the careful perusal of the humbling and admonitory history now before us, we shall find that, although the fall of Peter, together with all the circumstances which led to it, and the repentance which followed, occurred within the space of a few hours, the fall itself was, nevertheless, gradual. It went from bad to worse ; and the several

steps conducting to it are all very distinctly marked. May we be divinely enabled so to trace the progress of this event, as to derive from it all the wholesome and necessary instruction which it is intended to yield !

We have already adverted to what we regard as the first thing serving to prepare for this melancholy issue ; namely, his sleeping in Gethsemane, instead of watching and praying. We shall not further dwell on this particular ; only observing, that the man who fails to pray, prepares his own way for a failure in every thing else that is good. He exposes himself undefended to the enemy, and fears before him. It was so with Peter. He was shorn of his strength, and quailed before the coming storm. He saw evils fast approaching, which he had neither courage nor power to meet. And, although he very much desired to see what would be the issue of the Saviour's apprehension, he could not brace himself up to brave the trials that were coming upon him ; and hence he "followed afar off." It was night when the soldiers arrested Christ ; and, under cover of the darkness, Peter follows the tumultuous gathering, hoping to be unobserved. It is dark, and he may not be seen ; he is only one of a disorderly mob, and may not be noticed. But, with all this to favour his safety, fear makes him cautious ; and he "followed afar off." Who would suppose that this man was a friend of Christ ? Who would think that he was particularly interested in the fate of Christ ? If he had been so, is it not probable that he would have kept near enough to

Christ to have cheered him with his countenance,—to have been able to converse with him,—to see all that was done, and hear all that was said. But, as he follows afar off, we may be excused for concluding that he has no particular interest in what is going on, and that he is only actuated, more or less, by the mad passion pervading the mob.

Now, we cannot but consider this position of Peter, in the rabble procession which followed in the wake of the soldiers who had taken the Redeemer captive, as, in the first place, altogether inconsistent with his previous professions. Surely this was not the place to be taken by him, who had so vehemently declared his strong, superior, and unalterable love to Christ. Love so ardent and self-sacrificing ought to have led him up to the side of Christ. If he had taken this position in consequence of the strong arm of the soldiery having been laid upon him, or under the pressure of an overwhelming crowd, we could easily understand it. But to think of him *voluntarily* and *designedly* taking his place in the rear, and following afar off, skulking behind to be out of harm's way, is inconsistent and afflictive indeed. It was unworthy conduct, viewed in relation to Christ. He deserved better things of Peter. Many a favour he had shown him,—many a blessing conferred upon him; and this was a miserable return for all his friendship and kindness.

This position was as unfortunate in its influence upon Peter, as it was improper in itself. A man of Peter's tem-

perament, especially, was likely to be damaged by this step. It was taking the most effectual way to foster his fear and increase it, and to render more acute his sensibility to harm and annoyance. If he had taken a bold and decided step at the onset,—stood by the side of his Lord,—openly identified himself with him, and resolved to carry out his previous declaration, that he would go to prison with him rather than forsake him,—the immediate effect upon his own mind would have been most beneficial. The decision would have braced up his courage. He would have gathered strength in the effort to master his feelings and fears. But, instead of this, he nursed his fears by following afar off; and, by an inevitable law of the human mind, he would become every moment increasingly sensitive to danger and difficulty, and the prospect of bodily harm. Deliberately to yield to fear is to be conquered by it, and unnerved in the presence of the thing which is feared.

In addition to this, we may very well suppose that, if, instead of following behind, Peter had boldly gone up to Christ, and walked by his side, he would have been benefited by the counsels of Christ, by his calmness and self-possession, and by the words of comfort and of hope which he would have spoken to him. The Saviour would have honoured the disciple who thus honoured him; and Peter, instructed and cheered by the example and the conversation of his Lord, might have been saved from his dreadful fall. But he “followed afar off,” and thus deprived him-

self of all such advantage. This, then, was the second fatal error in Peter's course.

But this was not all. He took another and most disastrous step ; and, as we think, under the influence of the same fears, and the same hope of escaping detection as a disciple of Christ. It would appear that, on reaching the palace of the High Priest, Peter was at first unable to obtain admission. He had followed Christ thus far, that he might see the end, but was after all likely to be balked in his purpose. Fortunately, however, for his wishes, there was one of the disciples of Christ who was known to the High Priest, and who used his influence to obtain admission for Peter. This other disciple* (by many supposed to be John, though without any satisfactory evidence) went out, "and spake unto her that kept the door, and brought in Peter."

* "There are many conjectures who this disciple was: *Jerome, Chrysostom, Theophylact, Nonnus, Lyra, Erasmus, Piscator*, and others, say it was *John*. It is true, John frequently mentions himself in the *third* person ; but then he has always, "*whom Jesus loved*," as in chap. xiii. 23 ; xix. 26 ; xxi. 7, 20 ; except in chap. xix. 35, where he has plainly pointed out himself as writer of this Gospel ; but, in the place before us, he has mentioned no circumstance by which that disciple may be known to be John. To this may be added, that John being not only a *Galilean*, but a fisherman by trade, it is not likely that he should have been known to the High Priest, as it is here said of that disciple who followed Jesus with Peter. The conjecture of Grotius is the most likely ; namely, that it was the person at whose house Jesus had supped. St. Augustine, *Tract.* 113, speaks like a man of sound sense. 'We should not decide hastily,' says he, 'on a subject concerning which the Scripture is silent.'"—
DR. CLARKE.

Peter was thus admitted within the palace, so far as that he was enabled to see what was passing in that portion of the palace where Christ was being examined. In some way or other the hall in which Peter was appears to have been distinct from the apartment in which the Court was sitting, and yet contiguous to it. It is described by St. Luke as "the hall," in the midst of which they kindled a fire. St. Mark says, "Peter was beneath in the palace;" and St. Matthew, that "he sat without in the palace." Probably, this was a sort of antechamber to the hall where Christ was undergoing his trial: or it may have been part of the same hall; the other part, where proceedings were being conducted, being elevated above the rest to serve for a tribunal.

This, however, is not material. The only particular of moment is, that here, by the fire in this hall of the High Priest's palace, the servants were gathered together. The night was cold, and they were warming themselves by the fire; and Peter joined them. He mixed himself with them, evidently that he might not be suspected of any connexion with Christ: and he very likely thought, that he had secured a favourable position for his purpose. He stood warming himself by the fire, and waiting "to see the end;" either the end of the trial, or the result of it in reference to Christ. He was anxious to ascertain what all this procedure would result in; whether Christ would be set free, or be punished.

This desire of Peter was, so far, creditable to him; but the way in which he sought to gratify it, was objectionable

and dangerous. The servants in the hall were not fit company for him. They were the enemies of Christ, and Peter had no business in their society. If, indeed, he had been thrown into that society unavoidably, no harm might have followed: he could then have looked to God to preserve him. But when he voluntarily placed himself in it, and that, too, under the influence of a cowardly and unworthy feeling, he forfeited all claim on the guardianship of God. He mingles with these servants of the High Priest, that he may not be thought to differ from them: he keeps company with the enemies of Christ, that he may not be taken for one of his friends. How unworthy this conduct was, on the part of one to whom Christ had shown so many favours, and who had made so many professions of love! At the least it might have been expected, that Peter would have given Christ his countenance and sympathy, if he could give him no more. But, alas for human nature! the man who said he would give his liberty and his life for Christ, fails to give him even the countenance of his presence, and does his best to injure and grieve him by openly holding intercourse with his foes. Whether Peter stood silently by the fire, or whether he took part in the conversation which we cannot doubt took place among the servants during the excitement of this affair, we do not, and cannot, know; but, in either case, he was to be blamed. If he was silent while popular frenzy was at its height, and shared in by the servants, and while the character of his Master was being

traduced, it was discreditable to him to have been so: and if he spoke, it clearly must have been in such a way as not to compromise himself, or awaken suspicion of his being a disciple,—and in that case he was a coward.

But excuse is offered for him. It was now about midnight, and the night was cold: Peter naturally went towards the fire to warm himself. It was the genial warmth of the fire he sought, and not the company of the servants. Beside, he was as well by the fire as he would have been any where else, as far as helping Christ is concerned. All this is easily admitted; but, surely, the man who was ready to share a prison with Christ, or suffer death for him, might have borne the cold for an hour. Is it come to this, after all, that a cold night is sufficient to separate him from his Lord? that the warmth of the fire has greater attraction than Christ? For the sake of this, will he hold fellowship with those who traduce his Master's name, and who clamour for his blood? We are asked, What could he have done? In what way could he have been of service to Christ? Probably he could have done nothing of any importance to the cause of the Saviour; but that is not the question. Christ was clearly entitled to the sympathy of his disciples; and it was due to him that, at the least, Peter should keep from among his enemies. Peter might not have been able to render any aid to his suffering Lord; but, at any rate, he might have acted more worthily of himself, and more to his own advantage. It would have

been greatly to his credit to have avowed his love to Christ, and have given some proof of it when Christ was so sorely tried. If Peter had kept from the company of the servants in the hall, he would not have become such a melancholy illustration of the inspired saying, "Evil communications corrupt good manners."

Nothing endangers our piety more than mixing in the society of the unsaved; and especially if we do so voluntarily, and without any call of duty. It is barely possible, in such a case, to maintain our religion, and continue unhurt by surrounding influences. The spirit, conversation, and conduct of the worldly and the profane are every way calculated to damage our spiritual principle and feeling. We shall either exert an influence upon them for good, or they will exert an influence upon us for evil; and this latter is by far the more probable. Would not he be reckoned foolish who should go into a vitiated atmosphere, calculating that healthy respiration would not be interfered with? Does a man stand where poisonous vapours are exhaled, and take no harm?

But there are few objectionable things for which men are not prepared to set up some plea. So, in regard to this unnecessary mixing with the ungodly, it is urged, "We act under the influence of a pure motive. We go to set them a good example. Our presence, as religious professors, will exercise a salutary restraint, and keep them within proper bounds. We will endeavour to lead the conversation to some profitable, or at least harmless

and agreeable, subject ; and thus we may be useful,—preventing evil, and pervading with a leaven of good.” Now, admitting all this purity of motive and excellence of design, we may be permitted, nevertheless, to warn you, that it will require, even then, great care and circumspection in order to keep your garments unspotted from the world. And may we not, without any breach of charity, say, that there is reason to fear that this plea of intention to do good, in the case referred to, is sometimes insincerely put forward? Is it not, in many cases, only a pretext, under cover of which it is sought to gratify a worldly and unsanctified affection? Are there not many persons who go into the society of the irreligious, and take part in the conversation and amusements that are going forward, simply because their tastes lie in that direction ; while, at the same time, they try to persuade themselves and others that they are actuated by better views and feelings? Nothing can save such persons from harm. They have no wish to keep themselves from evil ; and their hypocrisy forbids that they should be kept of God.

It is not to be concluded, from these remarks, that in no case are the pious to have fellowship with the ungodly ; “for then,” as St. Paul says, “must ye needs go out of the world ;” and some of our most important duties would be neglected. There are among the unsaved many of our kindred ; it may be, some of our nearest and dearest relatives, for whose spiritual interests we are bound specially to care. We cannot stand aloof or withdraw from them

without sin. It would be unmanly, unchristian, and unkind to think of doing so. They need our instruction, our example, and our prayers. But in this case, to be in their company and fellowship is in the way of our duty; and we have therefore a gracious confidence in God, that he will keep us, and vouchsafe to us his blessing. He will uphold us, and we shall be safe. And while our efforts and example are sustained by prayer to him, we shall be made a blessing. But this is altogether another matter from that we are now contemplating in the case of Peter. With reference to him there are two things to be remarked:—the first is, that he had no occasion to mix himself up with the servants in the hall; it was no part of his duty to do so, and under the circumstances it was unseemly and a fault: the second thing is, that he did this under the influence of an unworthy motive; it was to escape detection as a disciple of Christ. On these two grounds, therefore,—that he had gone where duty did not call him; and that he was in some sense ashamed of Christ, and afraid of being involved in harm if recognised as one of his disciples,—on these two grounds he had forfeited all claim upon the divine care and blessing. He was thus without shelter from the storm just ready to burst upon him. And although we are humbled and afflicted in contemplating the catastrophe which so speedily followed, we cannot wonder at it. Peter had prepared his own way for falling, and it would have been a miracle if he had not fallen.

It has already been intimated, that, although the history of the fall of Peter is comprised within a very brief period of time, his fall was nevertheless by degrees,—from step to step,—from bad to worse. It is of importance to note this, because it will be found that this mournful example of human frailty is illustrative of the *rule* obtaining in the fall of religious professors, and not of the *exception*. It is by no means common for a religious person to lapse all at once into sin,—open and gross sin. Generally speaking, men fall by little and little. They gradually retrace their steps to the world; and it is not difficult to mark the several stages in their advance to open and gross sin. Perhaps there is, first, disrelish of spiritual things; followed by the neglect of religious means and duties, and then by the overt acts of sin.

It would not, indeed, be difficult to cite the example of some one who has been suddenly overtaken, and who has at once fallen from grace into open sin. Peculiar and fierce temptation has unexpectedly assailed him: in a moment the enemy has come in like a flood, and every thing has been swept away. In some extraordinary instances, temptations have come down like an avalanche from the Andes, or like the resistless torrent from a bursting reservoir; and the poor frail one, surprised and confounded, has been overwhelmed in a moment. But such a case is the *exception*, not the *rule*. Backsliding in religion is generally gradual; and the only safe course, therefore, is to watch against and resist beginnings.

“This night,” said Christ to Peter, “before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice.” And so it came to pass. Three times on that memorable night he was accused of being a disciple, and as often he denied it. He denied all knowledge of Christ,—all connexion with him,—all interest in him. This denial, however, assumed three different forms. The forms were those of *equivocation*, *lying*, and *profanity*. Notice we, then—

I. *The pitiful equivocation.* The damsel who kept the door, and who let in Peter at the request of that other disciple, was the first to suspect and accuse him of being connected with Christ. She watched him, as he stood warming himself by the fire; and then, persuaded that her suspicions were well-founded, she said, “And thou also wast with Jesus of Nazareth. But he denied, saying, I know not, neither understand I what thou sayest.” Peter was thrown into confusion. The charge came unexpectedly: and he was not prepared to rebut it. In the embarrassment of the moment, he answered to the charge, as if he did not comprehend the meaning of the words in which it was preferred; or as if he could not understand how such a charge should be laid against him: “I know not, neither understand I what thou sayest.” He endeavours to evade the accusation by cavilling with the terms in which it is expressed; as if he would say, “What can be meant by accusing me? Why should I be suspected? What evidence is there against me? Who is this Jesus of Nazareth? What do

you mean by having been with him? There were multitudes with him in the garden : why do you single me out from the whole? You charge me with being a disciple, what is it to be a disciple? Why do you take me for one?" "I know not, neither understand I what thou sayest."

Peter had now a noble opportunity of confessing Christ ; but, instead of improving it as he ought to have done, he acted as if it were discreditable to be connected with Christ, and a matter involving too much danger to admit of his acknowledging him. At the same time, he does not appear to have been quite prepared, deliberately and formally, to deny Christ. He dare not confess him : and he is not yet blinded and hardened enough to deny him in so many words. Practically, he will deny Christ, so as to be saved from any personal inconvenience and harm ; but, if it be possible, he will do this in such a way as not to tell a deliberate falsehood. He attempts to shuffle out of the difficulty, by a pretence of ignorance of what his accuser meant. It was but a paltry subterfuge. And it may be safely affirmed, that the man who will condescend to it, is in danger of something worse. Equivocation is next-door neighbour to lying. It proceeds from a state of mind almost identical with that which leads to lying. In both there is the wish to conceal a fact, the admission of which may involve in inconvenience and harm. Equivocation is a mean way of hiding truth,—but it is a dangerous one. It is such a trifling with the

sacredness of truth, as cannot be indulged in with impunity. The beauty of truth will be obscured, the obligation of truth will be unheeded, and the force of truth unfelt. And at no distant period, the pitiful equivocation will be followed by—

II. *The direct lie.* After the first denial of Christ, Peter retired from the hall into the porch: this he did, probably, to conceal his confusion, and in the hope of avoiding a further accusation. He had not been long in the porch, however, before another maid saw him; and this maid knew him to be one of the companions of Christ. She said to them who were standing by, “This fellow was also with Jesus of Nazareth.” This statement of the maid was received by all: they echoed the charge; and Peter found himself in a more critical position in the porch, where he thought to be unnoticed, than when he stood warming himself by the fire: and he sees, that if he would escape from his embarrassment, he must take a much more decided course than he took before. There is no chance now in mere evasion. To answer ambiguously will be to confirm what they say. To equivocate, as he did in the former instance, will now be practically to admit the accusation. This second denial must, therefore, be put in the most unmistakeable terms: and Peter now boldly affirms, in so many words, that he is not one of Christ’s disciples; adding, to make his denial still more complete and effective, “I do not know the man.” Peter had no connexion with Christ, felt no interest in him, and

had no knowledge of him. "I do not know the man." Considering the person by whom, and the circumstances under which, these words were spoken, we may fairly say, that the lie which they expressed was one of the most astounding ever uttered by the lips of man. It is difficult to imagine how Peter could have spoken them; and to describe the state of mind in which he was when he did so, is altogether impossible. He was among the first of those who became the disciples of Christ. He was one of the earliest called to the apostleship. No man knew Christ better than Peter did. During some years he had been on the most intimate terms with him, and privileged to enjoy the most familiar and happy intercourse. On several occasions he had received special tokens of the confidence and friendship of Christ. He had been selected, as one of three disciples, to witness some of the most remarkable events of the Saviour's life. For him, therefore, above all others, to say, "I do not know the man," may well awaken our astonishment to its utmost limit, and make us sore amazed. If we had not the divine record of the fact, it would be next to impossible to argue successfully the possibility of his having done so. After years of acquaintanceship with Jesus,—years of companionship in travel,—years of attachment to him, and of enjoyment in his company and service,—after these years, for Peter to say, "I do not know the man," is a prodigy of falsehood, in the contemplation of which the mind reels and staggers. Peter had been but a very few minutes absent

from the place where he stood and gazed upon Christ, while undergoing his trial; he is now but a few yards from the spot where Jesus is standing in the presence of his accusers, and before his Judge; and we wonder that Peter is not frightened with the thought, that Christ may hear him thus wickedly denying him. "I know not this man!" Was memory then extinct? Had all the scenes through which we have thus far followed him passed away from his recollection? What! not know the man who hailed thee from the shore of Galilee, and bade thee follow him? Not know the man with whom thou hast eaten and drunk in the house at Bethsaida? Not know the man with whom thou hast so often walked to the synagogue at Capernaum, to listen to his discourses, and behold his wondrous works of power and love? Not know the man whom thou hast often seen healing diseases and expelling demons? Not know the man whom thou hast entertained, again and again, at thine own table? Not know the man who miraculously cured thine own wife's mother, when sick of a great fever? the man who has so frequently sailed with thee in thy boat on the Lake of Tiberias, and preached therefrom to the multitudes assembled on the shore? the man whom thou didst see so wondrously transfigured on the holy Mount, and, but a few hours ago, so sorrowful and stricken in the Garden of Gethsemane? What! not know him with whom thou hast spent the whole of this very day? with whom thou hast eaten the Passover, and then walked from Jerusalem

to Gethsemane? the very man to whom thou hast professed the strongest attachment, and for whom thou hast declared thyself willing to sacrifice both liberty and life? O, Peter! if good angels ever weep, they may well weep over thee: if evil and accursed spirits ever triumph over the wreck of virtue, this is their hour, and thou art their theme!

But we have not yet reached the end of this sorrowful tale. There is something worse yet to be told. In the course upon which Peter has entered, there is a downward progress, startling and terrific. He loses all self-command, and is liable to fall into any sort of evil,—any depth of sin. We have heard him equivocate,—we have heard him utter deliberate falsehood; we must now listen for a moment to—

III. *The profane swearing* with which he accompanies his third denial of Christ. After the second denial, Peter came in from the porch, and stood again in the hall, within sight of Christ, although, probably, at some distance from him. Here he remained for about an hour, when a third party charged him with having connexion with Christ. “Of a truth this fellow also was with him: for he is a Galilean.” Christ was reckoned a Galilean: most of his disciples were of that province; and their provincial dialect betrayed them. They said to Peter, “Surely thou also art one of them: for thy speech bewrayeth thee.” Another corroborative evidence was now at hand to carry home the charge of discipleship.

The kinsman of Malchus, whose ear Peter had cut off in the Garden, came forward, and said, "Did not I see thee in the Garden with him?" The evidence against Peter is thus accumulating, and he finds that a simple denial, however plain and complete, will be of no avail. Here is a man who actually saw him with Christ, as one of his disciples. Peter cannot deny this, or set aside the witness. And, perceiving that a lie would answer no purpose, he then "began to curse and to swear, saying, I know not this man of whom ye speak." He denied all knowledge of Jesus, and solemnly appealed to God in confirmation of the truth of what he said. He calls down curses on himself, if what he now said was false. He had the hardihood and wickedness to call upon God to affirm as a truth, what he knew to be a falsehood. And thus the melancholy climax has been reached. We have dwelt upon it with reluctance and pain; but we could not pass it over. May we be enabled, by the teaching and grace of God's Holy Spirit, to lay to heart the solemn admonition, and the humbling lessons, which the history of Peter's fall conveys!

Having thus so deplorably fallen, the wonder is to find that he has not sinned beyond all possibility and hope of recovery,—that he has not become utterly apostate. Our wonder at this, however, will cease, when we recollect, that Peter had been not more earnestly warned, than he had been successfully prayed for, by Christ. "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he

may sift you as wheat : but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not : and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren." By this prayer of Christ, Peter was saved from complete and final apostasy,—saved from everlasting ruin. Nothing could have arrested him in his downward progress but the gracious hand of the Omnipotent. That hand was put forth in answer to the Saviour's special prayer. "I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not." But was this prayer answered? Did not Peter's faith fail? Undoubtedly it did; but not to the extent implied in the words which the Saviour used. He prayed that Peter's faith might not *utterly fail*,—that he might not *fall off entirely*, and so be *finally lost, as altogether apostate*. Now, in this sense of the word, the prayer was fully and mercifully answered; and so Peter was saved from being eternally undone. Let no man, however, venture to sin after the manner of Peter, in the expectation of being kept, like him, from complete and final apostasy. Nothing could be more unwarrantable and dangerous. We may not sin, in any case, that grace may abound. And although in this particular instance Christ *specially prayed for Peter*, no man can be certain that Christ will *thus* pray for *him*. It is by a fearful perversity of the human mind, that the infinite grace of God is thus abused, and made a plea for deliberate transgression. The turpitude of such a transgression is increased tenfold by wicked presumption on abounding mercy.

In a somewhat popular Commentary by an American

Minister, recently published in this country, there is a note on this subject which we think pre-eminently misleading and mischievous. It is with unfeigned reluctance that we advert to it. The Commentary is, in many respects, able and excellent; and one all the more regrets that it should be disfigured with sentiments which will bear the test neither of holy Scripture, nor of a true philosophy. The note is as follows: "The word 'faith' here seems to be used in the sense of 'religion,' or 'attachment to Christ;' and the words 'fail not' mean, *utterly fail*, or 'fail altogether;' that is, apostatize. It is true that the *courage* of Peter failed. It is true that he had not that immediate confidence in Jesus, and reliance on him, which he had before had. But the prayer of Jesus was, that he might not altogether apostatize from the faith. God heard Jesus *always*. (John xi. 42.) It follows, therefore, that *every* prayer which he ever offered was answered; and it follows, that, as he asked here for a specific thing, that thing was granted: and as he prayed that Peter's faith might not utterly fail, so it follows that there was no time in which Peter was not really a pious man. Far as he wandered, and grievously as he sinned, yet he well knew that Jesus was the Messiah; he *did know* the Man; and though his fears overcame him, and led him to aggravated sin, yet the prayer of Christ was prevalent, and he was brought to true repentance."

In the closing sentence of this note we cordially concur:

“The prayer of Christ was prevalent, and Peter was brought to true repentance.” But how that can be made to prove “that there was no time in which Peter was not really a pious man,” we cannot imagine. That the prayer of the Redeemer was answered in saving Peter from complete and final apostasy, we can easily understand; but the logic of concluding from this, that, when Peter was lying, cursing, and swearing, he was “really a pious man,” it is not easy to discover. That must certainly be a singular sort of piety, which is consistent with lying and profane swearing. It is argued that, as Christ here “asked for a specific thing,” and was always heard in the thing he asked, so now the “specific thing” was granted. But what was this “specific thing?” Our commentator says, it was that Peter “might not altogether apostatize from the faith.” That “specific thing” was granted; Peter did not completely and finally apostatize: but it by no means follows that Peter was always “really a pious man.” *That* was not what Christ prayed for; and it was not included in the answer which his prayer received. That Peter was truly pious before this sad event, we do not doubt; and that he was afterwards restored by the mercy of God, and was pious subsequently to his restoration, we thankfully believe: but that he was “really a pious man,” while with oaths and cursing he denied all knowledge of Christ, is a position so monstrous as to make us marvel how any man could possibly assume it. “When thou art *converted*,” said Christ. *His* piety is at

any rate open to question, who needs to be converted. And, besides, common sense is outraged by the statement, that a man is pious and profane at the same moment of time,—a saint and a sinner. We might as well be told that a man is standing upright when he is lying prostrate on the ground. Can it be light and dark at the same instant in one place? Can a thing be true and false in the same respects, or bitter and sweet? The difference between piety and profanity is at least as great as between any of these things. But all difference is confounded, all distinction lost, when you receive as true that Peter never for a moment ceased to be a really pious man. The wicked sinner is a saint; and you may not conclude from a man's sin, however aggravated it may be, that he is other than a saint of God,—a really pious man. The man who can reconcile this doctrine with either common sense or the Bible, is capable of doing any thing.

The Saviour, no doubt, knew all that had taken place; and, while grieved by the faithlessness of his disciple, he yearned for his recovery. True to the prayer which he had already offered up in his behalf, he now turned and looked upon Peter; and, at the same moment, the cock crew, and Peter then remembered the word of his Lord; and St. Mark says, with inimitable beauty and pathos, “When he thought thereon, he wept.”

The crowing of the cock, and the look of Christ, were the means employed to bring Peter's sin to his remembrance. That look of Christ, we may suppose, was one of

mingled pity, reproach, and love; and it served to melt down the heart of the unfaithful disciple in deep and godly sorrow. We can easily enough conceive something of the effect produced by this look of Christ; but it is altogether impossible for even the most practised pen to describe the look itself: the pencil of the first master would fail to depict it. That look was resistless. All the warnings Peter had received, all the love of the Master whom he had so shamefully denied, all the sin of which he had been guilty, rose up before him, and overwhelmed him. A tide of bitter and sorrowful feeling rolled through his spirit, and, unable to refrain himself, "he went out, and wept bitterly." And well he might weep bitterly. His sin had been most grievous. If his tears of penitential grief were bitter in proportion to his sin, then they were only less bitter than those which are shed in the regions of despair.

"He went out, and wept bitterly." The Lord looked upon Peter; but Peter could not bear to look upon Christ. He felt humiliated and ashamed; his heart was broken, and, retiring from the place where he had been guilty of such unworthy conduct, he sought some secret place where he might, unobserved and undisturbed, pour out his cries and tears. How long he remained in this privacy, we cannot tell; and we are not curious to inquire. Perhaps he remained there all the period of our Saviour's passion; but, however this may be, it is enough for us to know that his was "the godly sorrow which worketh repentance

to salvation not to be repented of." God heard the sighings of his broken and contrite heart, marked the bitter tears he shed, and listened to his earnest prayer for mercy. Peter was forgiven. He was converted, and, shortly afterwards, was able to re-affirm his love to Christ in presence of his fellow-disciples; and to do so with the utmost confidence, appealing to Christ himself, as knowing all things, for confirmation of the truth of what he said: "Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee." Ecclesiastical history reports that, ever after, when St. Peter heard the crowing of a cock, he fell upon his knees and mourned. Others say that he was wont to rise at midnight, and spend the time in penitent devotion between cock-crowing and daylight. Whether these things were so, we are not able to say; but of this we are sure,—that Peter's penitence was genuine, and the fruits of it lasting. He received mercy at the hand of God; and by the whole occurrence a salutary effect was produced upon him, which was permanent during his life.

It only remains for us now to point out some of the more important lessons which this affecting history is so well adapted to teach us. The first, and the great, lesson is, the folly and danger of self-confidence. "He that trusteth in his own heart," says Solomon, "is a fool." This was Peter's great error. He was strong in himself. He presumed upon his own good qualities; and, alas for him! he found them like a broken reed in the hour of temptation and trial. "Let him that thinketh he

standeth take heed lest he fall.” There is no help for any of us but in God : they only are safe whom he keeps. We do not, in these observations, reflect upon the genuineness or the strength of your Christian graces, any more than we reflect upon those of Peter ; but they are not for you to *trust* in, but, by watchfulness and prayer, to cherish and preserve. Whatever may be the extent of a man’s Christian knowledge, the clearness and grasp of his faith, the sincerity and fixedness of his purpose, the warmth of his zeal, and the purity of his love, he only stands secure so long as he stands in the strength of God. They that trust in the Lord shall be “as Mount Zion, which cannot be moved ;” but they that trust in any thing else will stumble and fall. Wisdom, courage, faith, *all* will prove insufficient, when the enemy comes in like a flood, unless *the Spirit of the Lord* lift up a standard against him. And this we cannot expect him to do, if, in any sense, we trust in ourselves. Our only “hope is in the Lord, who made heaven and earth.” Let us put our whole trust and confidence in him ; so shall we be able to sing right joyfully the song of Israel’s sweet singer : “He will not suffer thy foot to be moved : he that keepeth thee will not slumber. Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep. The Lord is thy keeper : the Lord is thy shade upon thy right hand. The sun shall not smite thee by day, nor the moon by night. The Lord shall preserve thee from all evil : he shall preserve thy soul. The Lord shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in

from this time forth, and even for evermore." (Psalm cxxi. 3-8.)

Should these pages come under the eye of any one who has fallen from grace, who has practically denied his Lord, and forfeited the joy of his salvation, we have a word for him,—a word of pity and encouragement. We would grieve with him over his fall, and mourn at the Saviour's feet. But we sorrow not without hope. There is mercy with Him still. Seek it. Cast yourself at the foot of his cross. Trust again in his dying love; and he will recall you by "that pitying look,"—

"That kind, upbraiding glance, which broke
Unfaithful *Peter's* heart."

Poor backslider! your sin has been great; and we do not wonder that you should weep so bitterly. We rejoice to witness your fast-falling tears, and to hear the sighings and the groanings of your contrite and troubled heart. It is right that you should be distressed; but you must not despair. We see in your distress a pledge of coming good,—the evidence of grace. You are now being prepared to receive again the salvation of God. He is wounding, that he may heal; humbling, that he may exalt, you. You are now tasting the sorrows of death and the pains of hell; but you will thereby be qualified to receive and appreciate the joy of his favour and love. "Weeping may endure for a night; but joy cometh in the morning." Surely he will save you. After all that you have done, his mercy is not clean gone; his bowels

of compassion are not closed against you. He pities you still, and will forgive you. Do not doubt the efficacy of his blood. Do not put away from you, as inapplicable to your particular case, the promises of pardon to the penitent sinner. Do not sin against the grace which is producing your sorrow and desire, and which is itself evidence of the merciful purpose of your Saviour to restore you. He pardoned Peter; and, if you weep like Peter, he will also pardon you.

SCENE VIII.

DINING WITH CHRIST ON THE SHORE OF TIBERIAS.

“So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my lambs. He saith to him again the second time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my sheep. He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep. Verily, verily, I say unto thee, When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not. This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God. And when he had spoken this, he saith unto him, Follow me.”—John xxi. 15-19.

TOWARD the close of the day, a group of Galilean fishermen may be seen standing together on the shore of the Lake Tiberias. They seem to be in the mood of men who have nothing particular to engage their attention; upon whose time, for the present, there are no special demands. The group consists of “Simon Peter, Thomas called Didymus, and Nathanael of Cana in Gali-

lee, and the sons of Zebedee, and two other of the disciples” of Christ. Drawing near to this company of fishermen, the first words we hear are spoken by Simon Peter. He “saith unto them, I go a fishing;” just as if the thought had suddenly occurred to him that it was strange for him to be idling away his time on the shore; that he might as well be away to sea, and engaged in the duties of his calling: and so they all thought, as soon as Peter had intimated his intention to them. “They say unto him, We also go with thee.” The action is suited to the word, their purpose promptly carried into effect. “They went forth, and entered into a ship immediately.” There is a time for every thing; and every thing is beautiful in its season. There is a time for rest, as well as a time for toil. Fishermen cannot, any more than others, be always engaged in their laborious calling. Industrious application, whether of the mind or of the body, is followed by weariness and exhaustion; and a season of refreshment and repose is necessary. That season had been enjoyed by the disciples; and the time for work had come. They had been long enough on the land: it was now time for them to be off to sea.

For a while, however, it seemed as if they might as well have remained on the shore: “That night they caught nothing.” There is much uncertainty about the fisherman’s calling. The toil is often endured, and the danger braved, apparently in vain. It happened thus to the disciples on several occasions: they did their best,

and were wholly unsuccessful. It would have sometimes been very difficult to persuade them of the truth of what the Wise Man says,—that “in all labour there is profit.” And yet this is true; and it was true even in the present instance. “That night they caught nothing;” but the unsuccessfulness of the night was more than compensated by the miraculous draught of fishes in the morning: the unrequited toils of many dark hours were amply rewarded by the appearance of Christ on the shore, as morning began to break. The gracious discovery of Jesus to them, and the fresh proof he gave them of his miraculous knowledge and power, were cheaply bought by a long night of patient, but fruitless, labour.

The morning was spread upon the mountains of Galilee; but as yet the light was not sufficient to enable the disciples to distinguish the features or person of Him who stood on the shore, and hailed them with the kind inquiry, “Children, have ye any meat?” What tenderness these words express! what interest in the disciples’ welfare! The Stranger wished to know how it had fared with them during the night, and whether they had food for their present necessities. The question is proposed in tones so gentle and friendly, as plainly to show that no idle curiosity prompts it. It proceeded from a generous and affectionate heart. The words were spoken by One who was concerned for their comfort, and desired to promote it. And is not Jesus always interested in his disciples’ comfort? Is he not ever thinking of them, and

making provision for them? Does he not take knowledge of their temporal circumstances, as well as of what relates to their spiritual interests? Is not his care extended to the body as truly as to the soul? Nothing affecting the safety or happiness of his people is too insignificant for his condescending and wondrous love to notice. He asks about their food: "Children, have ye any meat? They answered him, No. And he said unto them, Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find. They cast therefore, and now they were not able to draw it for the multitude of fishes." Where is the region concealed from Christ? Which are the creatures uncontrolled by his power? His eye penetrates the deep sea; and the multitude of fishes gather, at his will, into the disciples' net.

The light of the morning was clearer now, and they might more easily recognise their Lord. But other light, beside that of the morning, breaks in upon them; and the miracle reveals to them who he was who hailed them from the shore. "That disciple whom Jesus loved saith unto Peter, It is the Lord." And Peter, hearing this, immediately girt his fisher's coat about him, and cast himself into the sea. Peter was always in a hurry. He seldom stopped to think what he was going to say or do. If he had, his sayings and doings would have often been more creditable to him. Not that we blame him now for yielding to the impulsiveness of his nature, although it led him to adopt a somewhat uncereemonious mode of reaching Christ. The other disciples, more orderly in their pro-

cedure, "came in a little ship, dragging the net with fishes."

Having reached the land, they found that Christ had been preparing for their entertainment. A fire was kindled, and fish were broiling on the coals, and bread was provided. "Jesus saith unto them, Come and dine;" or, "Come and eat;" for the original Greek word sometimes signifies, "to take meat in the morning;" so here it might be rendered, "Come and breakfast." Dr. Campbell observes, "The ancients used regularly but two meals in a day; we use three. As, of our three, dinner and supper have been regarded as the two principal, it has obtained, not only with us, but all over Europe, to call the first meal of the ancients by the first of these two, which is dinner; and the second by the latter, which is supper. It is the order which has fixed the names of these meals, and not the precise time of the day at which they were eaten, which is commonly variable."

To dine with Christ on the shore of Tiberias! What a privilege! O that we could thus enjoy the intimate friendship of Christ!—that we might be permitted to listen to his voice, and share in his solitudes, and feed upon the food his hands have prepared! But he walks no more on earth; he has returned to the glory which he had with the Father before the world began, and is no longer seen among men. True; but his heart is with us still; he reveals himself to them that seek him, and feeds them with the bread of life. And many a meal have

his disciples had, as real and blessed as was that on the shore of Galilee. "Behold," says he, "I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me."

Meanwhile, let us endeavour duly, and with thankful hearts, to appreciate the value of this divine record of what took place between Christ and his disciples, on this deeply interesting occasion. Much of valuable instruction may be gathered from it; and, accompanied by the Spirit's teaching and grace, the conversation may prove as profitable to us as it was to the disciples themselves.

Our remarks upon this narrative may be conveniently arranged under the following particulars:—The Important Question;—the Evangelical Commission;—and the Prophetic Intimation.

1. The Important Question:—"Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these?"

It is impossible to over-rate the importance of this question. It relates to the very essence of religion, and to that which is altogether, and in every case, indispensable. It concerned not Peter only, to know whether he loved Christ, but it concerns us all. At the same time, this question was with peculiar propriety proposed to Peter. He had professed this love to Christ,—lavishly and vehemently professed it. But, alas for him! his professions had been nullified by sad and shameful denials; and it was eminently fitting that he should now be asked, whether he had

recovered from his fall, and whether his heart again beat true to Christ. He had been humbled and afflicted, in penitential sorrow, for his sin; through divine mercy he had obtained forgiveness, and was restored to his former state; and now, in kindness, the Redeemer gives him an opportunity of declaring this, and re-affirming the fact of his love, in the presence of his fellow-disciples.

But had not all the disciples forsaken Christ in the hour of his trial, as well as Peter? and why are they not *catechized* as well as Peter? and especially with reference to their love to Christ? The answer is, that while all had been offended because of Christ, as he indeed foretold they would be, there were, nevertheless, peculiarities in the case of Peter. No one of them had made such professions as he had made, and no one of them had fallen so sadly. The grounds of inquiry were, therefore, stronger in his case than in theirs. At the same time, the love which was essential to Peter, was equally essential to all the disciples; and they would not fail to consider the Saviour's question as, in point of fact, proposed to every one of them.

This question was proposed three several times, probably for the purpose of impressing the disciples with the immense importance of the subject, and also in allusion to the thrice-repeated denial of which Peter had been guilty. The declaration of his love to Christ should be as formal, and as often repeated, as his repudiation of all knowledge of, or connexion with, Christ had been. "He saith unto

him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?" Peter was grieved at having the same question thus put to him again. He might suppose it to imply that the Saviour doubted the fact of his love, or his truthfulness in declaring it,—that he doubted the sincerity or the sufficiency of his repentance. Or Peter might think that this repetition of the question was calculated to damage him in the estimation of his fellow-disciples, as one whom the Redeemer could even now with difficulty believe. Perhaps, however, the secret of Peter's grief lay in the fact, that this thrice-proposed inquiry was taken as a direct and pointed allusion to his thrice-committed sin. Reminded thus of his melancholy offence, he was deeply and painfully moved. And now, as if appealing to the kindness as well as to the omniscience of Christ, that this questioning might terminate, he earnestly replies, "Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee."

It will be observed that the terms in which the question was put the first time differ somewhat from those which were employed in putting it the second and the third time. "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me *more than these?*" There is some degree of ambiguity in the sentence. It is not easy to determine what the words "more than these" refer to. Are they to be referred to the disciples themselves, or to their property? If to the latter, then the question put to Peter is, "Lovest thou me more than thou lovest thy property,—thy fish, and nets, and boat?" But if the words "*more than these*"

refer to the disciples, then the question may be understood as intended to ascertain whether Peter's love to Christ was greater than his love to these, considered as his intimate friends and associates: "Lovest thou me more than thou lovest these?" Or we may understand the Saviour as inquiring whether Peter thought he loved Christ more than his fellow-disciples loved Christ: "Lovest thou me more than these love me?" On the whole, we are disposed to think this last the correct construction of the words, and the one which is the most consistent with all the circumstances of the case. The first sense put upon the word is cold and degrading; and it scarcely seems befitting the dignity of Christ, or the importance of the occasion, gravely to ask a man whether he loved Christ more than he loved his fish.

Peter had in effect claimed to be under the influence of a love to Christ greater than that of his fellows, and which would be sufficient to save him from forsaking Christ, as they might possibly do. "All ye shall be offended because of me this night." To this Peter earnestly, if not indignantly, replied, "Though all should be offended, yet will I never be offended." His love, he thought, was purer than theirs, and firmer too. It would be strong enough to bind him to Christ, while they forsook him; and firm enough to support him, while they might fall. This was Peter's estimate of his love to Christ, but a few days before the interview we are now considering. And he is asked whether he is of the same opinion still. But

he has learned a salutary lesson, and takes a lowlier view of himself and his attainments. He will not venture to compare himself with others, or to claim a love superior to theirs: he is content with a plain and earnest declaration of the fact, "Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee."

Peter might have been asked many other questions different from this; and probably if some one else had been the catechist, love to Christ would have been the last thing thought of. But He, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, proposed the question which was of all others the most important and necessary: "Lovest thou me?" It is not, "Dost thou know me? Dost thou believe me to be the Messiah? Art thou of the same mind as when thou didst say, 'Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God?'" Dost thou approve my conduct, and understand my doctrine? Art thou prepared to identify thyself with me, and to abide by the fortunes of my cause?" All these questions would have been interesting and important. But Christ waives them all, and waives them because they are secondary and trifling as compared with this, or because this may be taken as including every one of them,—"*Lovest thou me?*" A thousand minor questions are merged in this one. If this can be answered in the affirmative, all else will follow. Happiness, holiness, and usefulness, all spring out of love to Christ, or follow in its train.

There are three views to be taken of this love, in

order to a correct apprehension of its importance and necessity.

First : *It is the divine and essential characteristic of New-Testament religion.* The doctrines which the Saviour taught, the institutions which he founded, and the duties which he enjoined, are all held subordinate to love. They are used as means for its production, or occasions for its developement and increase. The moral law itself, the entire range of its holy duties, will be found summed up in this divine affection. In answer to the question, "Which is the first and the great commandment?" Christ said, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." This supreme love of God, and, springing out of it, universal love to man, include all possible duty, and all attainable excellence. In earth or heaven there is nothing beyond the range of love. Love is therefore the fulfilling of the law. The ineffable perfections of the Deity, as revealed in the Gospel, are concentrated in this,—“God is love;” and to be religious, in the New-Testament sense of the term, is to be able to say, “We love him, because he first loved us.” “He that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.” This is the finished portraiture of Christian piety, the inspired description of the loftiest possible excellence and joy.

See how St. Paul exalts this love, while he proves its necessity: he enumerates the brilliant and miraculous endowments of the early church,—the supernatural powers of which many of its members made their boast,—and tells us that love is more necessary and valuable than them all. “Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.” The “new commandment,” which distinguishes the religion of Christ, is this, “Love one another:” and by our obedience to this commandment, all men are to know that we are the disciples of Christ.

This *primary* characteristic is an *essential* one. It cannot be dispensed with in any case. It cannot be substituted by any of the things in which men pride themselves, or by all of them put together. Theoretical belief of the divine mission and authoritative teaching of Christ; admiration of his character, and ministry, and life; reverence and respect for his holy institutions; the maintenance of an orthodox creed; and open identification with him and with his people in the matter of church-membership:—all these things, highly important as they

are, cannot fill the place of love, or be accepted for it. These are but the means, love is the end ; these are the shadow, love is the substance ; these are the body, love is the animating soul. Love is the alpha and the omega, the beginning and the end, of the religion of Christ. The kingdom of glory in heaven differs from the kingdom of grace on earth chiefly in this,—that in the former the God of love is more perfectly revealed, and more perfectly loved. Love is the grand revelation, love is the brilliant atmosphere, love is the lofty employment, love is the unending song, love is the ineffable and everlasting glory, of the heavenly world. Heaven is love, and love is heaven.

In insisting upon the necessity of this divine principle, and while showing its superiority to all things else that may be found connected with religion, we are sometimes in danger of producing, or of fostering, a mistaken opinion, that there is no particular or necessary connexion between a man's creed and profession on the one part, and the production and manifestation of this love to Christ on the other. We must not depreciate one class of things, in order to enhance the value of the other. A thing may be secondary, and yet highly important ; it may occupy a subordinate place, and nevertheless be essential. So it is in regard to some of the things which we have named as pertaining to religion. An orthodox creed, a New-Testament form of church-government, an accredited church-membership, and a Christian profession, are

matters entitled to our high consideration. God forbid that we should speak lightly of them. But then, the one thing concerning which Christ inquires is of higher consideration still: "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?" They are important, as secondary and subordinate; but this is pre-eminently important, as it is primary and indispensable.

The church of God in our country is divided into various sections, each differing from the other, more or less, in minor points of doctrine or of practice. These points of difference are often magnified, and taken to be the test of a man's Christianity. And to ask such questions as these: "Are you a Churchman, a Dissenter, or a Methodist? Are your views of church-government Episcopal, Presbyterian, or Congregational?" would be deemed the readiest and most effectual method of determining the validity of his claims to Christian discipleship. To many persons, it appears to be much more gratifying to find that a man belongs to a particular portion of the church, than to find that he belongs to Christ; the proof of his sectarianism yields a greater pleasure than does the proof of his Christianity. The mistake consists in putting their own particular church, and church-views, in the place of Christ, as the catechist; and the *sect* is made to say, "Lovest thou me?"

Now, without meaning in any degree to minify the things which distinguish one portion of the Lord's people from another, it must be earnestly and constantly main-

tained, that love to Christ is the one thing that decides the question of a man's religion. It must be affirmed again and again, that every thing else is referable to this as the end ; that every thing else is designed to produce this divine affection,—to maintain and increase it,—or to afford the opportunity for its developement. This one question, therefore, is proposed to every individual ; whether he is found in the magnificent cathedral, or in the unpretending meeting-house, or in the cottage prayer-meeting. In the church, the chapel, or the cottage, Christ inquires of each, as he did of Peter, “ Lovest thou me ? ”

Should these remarks fall under the notice of any one who is disposed to question their correctness, and to doubt whether this love to Christ be altogether so important and indispensable as we have represented it to be, we earnestly ask the attention of such to one word more. Other arguments might be advanced ; additional evidence might be adduced ; but, instead of further attempting to argue or to prove, we quote the plain, decisive, and thrilling words of St. Paul : “ If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha.” “ If any man,”—whoever he may be, whatever his pretensions, and by whatsoever excellencies he may be distinguished from others,—“ If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be accursed : the Lord cometh.”

But the importance and necessity of this love concern-

ing which the Redeemer makes inquiry, will further appear, if we consider that it is,

Secondly : *The formative element of the new and spiritual nature.* “The carnal mind,” by which we understand man’s unregenerated nature, “is enmity against God,” “is not subject to the law of God, neither, indeed, can be;” and so “they that are in the flesh”—living under the power of this carnal mind, which is opposed to the Divine authority—“cannot please God.” What a graphic and humbling picture of human nature ! By what means is this enmity subdued, this unholy nature changed ? The answer is, By the love of God which is shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost. God the Holy Ghost is the Agent in the renewal and sanctification of man ; and the instrument he employs is this love divine. This love is the holy fire which he enkindles, and wherewith he melts down the carnal enmity. With this fire he pervades the moral and spiritual system, refining the whole, and assimilating it to the nature of God, who is love. To ask a man, therefore, whether he is possessed of this divine principle, is, in effect, to ask him whether he has undergone that great spiritual change which the Saviour so often dwelt upon as essential, and without which no man can see the kingdom of heaven.

Thirdly : *This love is the only comprehensive and efficient principle of evangelical obedience.* “If ye love me, keep my commandments.” “Love is the fulfilling of the law.” Neither the conviction of moral duty, nor the fear

of punishment, will be found sufficient to deter from sin, or to secure the practice of virtue. But the love which we are now considering will at once prompt to obedience, and qualify for it. In proportion to the strength and purity of this principle, will be the completeness and the uniformity of our obedience to the revealed will of God. No duty will be irksome, no work disagreeable, to love. It will incline the heart to God's law, and make it strong to keep it. No exception will be taken to the character or the circumstances of the service required. No inclination will be felt to attend to *this*, because it is *easy*; or to neglect *that*, because it is *difficult*. It will be joy to the heart to do *all* His commandments. His entire service will be felt to be perfect freedom; and not only will that service be rendered as a duty, but it will also be enjoyed as a privilege. The love of Christ, felt in its mighty and blissful influence, will constrain the individual to live in every thing, not to himself, but to Him that died for him, and rose again. The heart of love will comprehend the words of Christ, so paradoxical to the unrenowned,—“My yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” What a singular statement to make concerning a yoke and a burden! How irksome and disagreeable to have a yoke about one's neck! Who likes to carry a burden? Who would not rather be relieved from it? *Relieved from it!* No. It is as our meat and drink to do the will of Christ. His law is “better to us than thousands of gold and silver; sweeter also than honey or the honey-comb.” His love

in the heart makes the yoke easy, and the burden light.

From all these considerations it clearly appears that the question proposed to Peter, and thrice repeated, related to what is *essential* in the religion of the Lord Jesus Christ, and was therefore of the greatest possible importance. And we are taught that man's moral nature cannot be renewed, and the moral law cannot be kept, but by this principle of love. It is this which distinguishes Christianity from every other form of religion known in the history of mankind. And it is by this that men are qualified for spiritual service on earth, and for the work and the joy of the blessed in heaven.

But if these things are so, how many persons are mistaken and deluded! Religion with multitudes is a thing having neither life nor power. It is mainly, if not exclusively, *theological, ritual, or sensuous*.

Theological religion is that of the man who has made up his mind to a set of doctrinal views, which he considers to be derived from the teaching of Christ and his Apostles, and to which he attaches undue, and, it may be, exclusive, importance. He may have been trained up in these views from childhood, or he may have gathered them from the public preaching of the word, or he may have acquired them by a long course of reading and examination: but in whatever way he may have become possessed of these views, he regards them as essential. Their maintenance, promulgation, and defence constitute his first duty.

They make up the sum of that "faith" for which he feels himself called "earnestly to contend." His *creed* is his religion. He will sacrifice any thing at the shrine of orthodoxy, the idol before which he falls down to worship. With him, ignorance and error are worse than sin; and heresy more to be feared than spiritual death. Alas! how grievous the mistake thus made! "Now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity." "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these?"

Ritual religion is that of the man who ceremoniously frequents the place of the holy, and is scrupulously exact in the observance of all that belongs to a merely external worship. He is never absent from his accustomed place in the sanctuary: he takes part in the psalmody, responds to the prayers, and listens to the discourse with unbroken attention. He is distressed by any violation of the order of public service, and by the most trifling breach of what he considers a due decorum. If he believed that every item of clerical costume was divinely prescribed, together with every movement, attitude, and gesture of the officiating Minister, and every intonation of his voice, he could not attach higher importance to them than he does. But, alas for him! he rests in the form, while, at least practically, he denies the power, of godliness. The form is important, but the power is unspeakably more so. "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these?"

Sensuous religion is that which connects itself with

ecclesiastical architecture, painting, music, sculpture, and clerical robes. A thousand deep emotions are awakened by these, and mistaken for religion. The gratification of a refined taste is a substitute for the "joy unspeakable, and full of glory." An exquisite sensitiveness to the beautiful is put in the place of a divine affection. Religion in this case is wholly dependent upon the senses. The voices of the choir, the mellifluous tones of the organ, its lofty swell and its thundering peal, charm the ear, and the heart is thrilled. The magnificent arch, the massive pillars, and the gorgeous window, with the thousand ornaments and beauties of a noble architectural pile, enchant the eye, and produce a rush of pleasurable feelings, beyond which, in religion, nothing is desired. But this is not enough. Hear the Redeemer: "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these?"

We pass on now to notice briefly,

II. The Evangelical Commission with which Peter was intrusted.

There was now confided to him the care of the Saviour's flock; and his duty, with regard to it, was clearly and authoritatively defined, "Feed my lambs:" "Feed my sheep." It may be well to observe here, that no duty was devolved upon Peter, and no office assigned to him, except in common with his fellow-disciples. He only was formally addressed; but that may be easily explained. There were, as we have already seen, special reasons for proposing the question, "Lovest thou me?" to him, rather than to them;

and the same reasons apply to the commission, and explain the fact of its being addressed to him. Peter, instead of receiving any office, or dignity, or power, peculiar to himself, is to be considered as, in point of fact, only restored to the place which he occupied previous to his melancholy fall. His love to Christ is ascertained in presence of his brethren ; and he being thus found morally qualified, Christ re-assigns to him his work ; gives him authority, with his fellows, to tend and care for the Redeemer's flock.

The disciples of Christ—those who believe in his name and associate together in his worship, and for the advancement of his spiritual kingdom among men—are often spoken of under the notion of a flock, of which he is the chief and divine Shepherd. As, for example, in the beautiful discourse in John x. : “ I am the good Shepherd : the good Shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. But he that is an hireling, and not the Shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth : and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep. The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep. I am the good Shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine. And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold : them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice ; and there shall be one fold,” or one flock, “ and one Shepherd.”

The good Shepherd was now about to return to heaven, and resume the glory which he had with the Father ; but he would not leave his flock unprovided for. Before he

goes away from them, he calls and qualifies men to act as under-shepherds; appoints their work, and commits to them the feeding of his lambs and sheep. By the "lambs" we are to understand the young among the Saviour's followers; but not the young in years only, but in Christian and gracious attainments. The sheep are the more matured, either in respect to years, or to the experience and manifestation of Christian grace and character. The lambs and the sheep, therefore, comprise the whole of the Saviour's flock.

The terms of the commission show us, that the care of Christ is at once comprehensive and discriminating. All the members of the flock are thought of, and their several necessities provided for. The young have wants peculiar to themselves; so also have the more advanced: and Peter is instructed with respect to both. It is unfortunate that this does not appear in the terms of his commission,—at least, in our English translation of them. "Feed" is the word used, both in reference to the lambs and to the sheep. And it is true that nourishment has to be provided for both; and so far it is correct to say, "Feed my lambs:" "Feed my sheep." But something is needed by the flock, beside good pasture; and that something is expressed in the original terms employed by Christ.

"Feed my lambs:" the word used here is *βόσκει*, and signifies, "to give them food." But when he says, "Feed my sheep," the word is, *ποιμαίνει*, which signifies, more largely, to do all the offices of a shepherd for them,—to

guide, watch, and defend them. The shepherd's business is not only to provide necessary food, but to guide the flock to where that food may be best obtained. His duty is to lead the flock in the green pastures, and by the still waters; and, while the sheep are feeding, to watch over them, lest any thing should harm them. There may be in the pasture, or in its immediate neighbourhood, that which would be dangerous or injurious to the flock: the good shepherd leads his flock away from this; and if there should be beasts of prey prowling around, he is prepared to defend the sheep.

Divine truth is the food of the church. "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." These words of God are to be given to his people; and *he* does this wisely and well, who distributes to every one his portion of meat in due season; who adapts the measure and the kind of truth to the necessities of individuals, and the circumstances both of time and place. The public preaching of the word is the chief, though by no means the only, vehicle to be employed in the conveyance of the truth. It may be conveyed through the channel of private intercourse, in the social and family gathering, and through the medium of the press. The truth as it is in Jesus is supplied to the souls of men, that they may thereby be nourished unto eternal life.

The institutions of religion supply food to the church. God has no graceless means. All of them are designed

to minister to the increased spirituality and vigour of his saints. And if persons shall discover a disposition to neglect these ordinances, it will be the shepherd's business to guide them to the pasture; just as he would guide the sheep from the bleak and barren common or highway, to the rich feeding of the grassy glade.

Shall we further say, that *Christ himself is the food of his church*? "I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world. Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth me shall live by me,—shall live for ever." In the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, Christ is exhibited to the faith of his people, and they "feed upon him in their hearts with thanksgiving." The servant of Christ, in administering this holy ordinance, feeds the flock.

Upon whom do these duties devolve? Who are the under-shepherds, whose business it is to provide the flock with food, to watch, to guide, and to defend it? Is this service common to all Christian people? Or are there some to whom, in an especial sense, the Saviour intrusts this work? It clearly cannot be the office of all; for, if all were shepherds, there could be no flock; whereas both the shepherd and the flock are necessary to constitute the church of Jesus Christ.

Who, then, are the shepherds? The answer is, The

Ministers of Christ ; the men who, from age to age, are raised up, and qualified for this office and work, and to whom the Head of the church says, "Feed my lambs : " "Feed my sheep." In the first instance, these words were spoken to Peter, and to his fellow-Apostles ; and *they* were called to this work, and received this divine commission. But it is to be observed, that at the very time when Christ committed the care of the flock to them, he was making provision for his church, not only during the period of their short life, and within the range of their personal residence and travel, but through all time, and in every land. Hence we find that, after the Saviour's ascension, the office is continued ; and, among other gifts to his church, we are told that he gave them "Pastors and Teachers." And St. Paul, in addressing the Elders at Ephesus, uses this language : "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you Overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock." (Acts xx. 28, 29.)

From this it is perfectly clear, that, although the Apostles were, under Christ, the first shepherds, the office and work of shepherds did not terminate with them. It has been provided that others shall, in this respect, take their place, and feed the flock of Christ. It is, indeed, freely admitted, that in the commission, as given to Peter and

his colleagues, there was much that was peculiar to them. Their plenary inspiration enabled them to supply the infallible truth of God ; they could not err in doctrine, or in aught that was essential to the founding and organization of the church. The authority and power of an Apostle were, no doubt, peculiar, because they sustained a peculiar office. To this office they received an extraordinary call, and, for the discharge of its duties, an extraordinary qualification. When they died, the apostolic office ceased, because the apostolic work was completed. They have had no successors, in the proper sense of that term. And it is a vain and foolish thing for any man to pretend that he has derived his ministerial authority, by lineal succession, from the Apostles. The doctrine understood by the phrase “apostolical succession,” is not contained in the New-Testament Scriptures ; and the establishment of the fact which it assumes is an utter impossibility. It is difficult to conceive of a higher style of impudence than is exhibited by the man who calls himself a “successor of the Apostles.”

There is, indeed, a succession in regard to the apostolic faith, and zeal, and love ; and a fellowship in the grand design of bringing men to Christ. Shepherds are still provided for the flock ; and by the faith which the Apostles once delivered to the Saints,—by the spirit which animated them in their work,—by the grace which sustained and comforted them in their difficulty and trial,—and by their burning zeal for the salvation of men and the

glory of Christ,—the called and chosen are qualified to feed, watch over, and defend the church of Christ.

While, however, it is thus maintained, that there is a distinct call to, and qualification for, the shepherd's office and work, we would not be understood as intimating that the care of the church is devolved exclusively upon the Minister, and that none other can, in any way, feed the lambs and sheep of the Saviour's flock. Unnumbered gifts are conferred upon the private members of the church, which it is their duty and their privilege to employ for the spiritual advantage of all around them, and especially for the benefit of those in church-fellowship with them. In regard to every gift and grace, the apostolical injunction is, "Seek that ye may excel to the edifying of the church." There is work for every man to do. Every man may have grace to do his work. And all who have received the truth should freely give it to others, and thus supply them with the aliment of spiritual life. In what other light should we regard Sunday-School instruction, Tract distribution, Bible circulation, and a thousand other forms of Christian effort obtaining in the present day, than that of subordinate methods of feeding the flock of Christ? And although there is a primary office of shepherd, and a separate race of men to fill that office, and discharge its duties, there is, nevertheless, a subordinate, yet important, sense, in which the great and divine Shepherd says to all, "Feed my lambs:" "Feed my sheep."

We ought carefully to observe, that not only in the terms of this commission did Jesus show his distinct and gracious interest in the young,—the lambs of his flock ; but on many occasions in the course of his personal ministry. He specially cared for the young ; he instructed them, and manifested a peculiarly tender interest in their welfare. So, also, ought his ministers ; so ought all in his service ; so ought the church. It is of the utmost importance that the young should be cared for. The church's stability and increase depend materially upon the nurture and guardianship of the young.

The duties of this evangelical commission could only be efficiently fulfilled by one who was divinely qualified. Without meaning in any way to disparage natural or acquired talent, it may be affirmed, that a preternatural qualification is indispensable. We gather this from the narrative before us. These duties were not devolved upon Peter, until the fact of his love to Christ had been carefully inquired into, and ascertained. Peter's knowledge, gifts, and training, however excellent in themselves, were not deemed sufficient to fit him for the office to which Christ now set him apart. And no more can these things be reckoned sufficient to qualify for the duties of the Christian ministry, or, indeed, for the duties of any other department of Christian service. Whatever may be a man's natural endowments, or his literary and classical acquirements,—to whatever pitch of ability he may have risen, and whatever may be the ecclesiastical

authority, in the exercise of which he may be set apart to the sacred office and work, we are bold to affirm, that, in the absence of a spiritual and divine qualification,—in the absence of this love to Christ,—he is no Minister of his. Christ calls no man to serve him, in the feeding of his flock, who cannot say, with Peter, “Lord, thou knowest that I love thee.” The ministry has been made by many a mere profession; and the church of the Redeemer has been blighted and cursed, by the intrusion upon her of men whose only qualifications, to serve her at the altar, have been literary and scholastic. Their lips have been familiar with the Saviour’s name, and their minds have been full of his truth; but their hearts never throbbed with his love. We do not undervalue classical training, literary furnishing, ecclesiastical authority; but we affirm that the grace of God, the teaching of his Spirit, and the love of the Saviour, are of far higher moment, and are, in fact, indispensable. To every man who is a candidate for ministerial service, the Redeemer says, “Simon, son of Jonas, Lovest thou me?”

Having ascertained Peter’s qualification, and appointed him his work, Christ proceeds to unveil to him the future, and to show him how his career of obedience and service would terminate.

III. The Prophetic Intimation is of a violent death, by which he would be called to glorify God:—“Verily, verily, I say unto thee, when thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest; but

when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not. This spake he, signifying by what death he should glorify God."

In youth Peter enjoyed personal freedom; he was the master of his own actions; he girded himself, or remained loose; he went or stayed at his own pleasure; walked when and where he would. But Christ tells him, that when he should be old, the case would be altogether different. Another should then gird him, and carry him "whither he would not." His personal liberty would be interfered with; he would be subjected to the will and power of another; and, no longer master of himself, he would be carried "whither he would not;" that is to say, where he would not naturally desire to be carried: not that he would be unwilling, or resist, so that physical force would be required in order to compel him. The contrary of this seems to be intimated in the words, "*Thou shalt stretch forth thy hands;*" willingly, and even cheerfully, submitting to be girded by another, and carried to a violent death.

From the earliest times the tradition has been, that Peter suffered martyrdom by crucifixion. And it is reported, that, feeling himself unworthy to be conformed to his Divine Master, even in the manner of his death, he requested that he might be crucified, not in the usual way, but with his head downwards; and that his request was complied with.

For all that belongs to the termination of Peter's Christian career, the reader is referred to "The Closing Scene," at the end of this volume. It is enough to observe in this place, that Peter is clearly informed that he must suffer a violent death; and that in that violent death he should glorify God.

A long course of years was before him, during which he would have numerous opportunities of glorifying Christ, by exhibiting him as the Son of God, and the Saviour of lost man; but having finished his day,—having preached and prayed, and toiled and triumphed,—his service would close in suffering; his life of piety and zeal would terminate in a painful death. And yet he need not shrink from the prospect; for, in death as in life, he should glorify God.

How many of the most eminent and honoured of the servants of the Lord Jesus have been called to suffer for his name! Their liberty has been taken away; their goods have been spoiled; their persons incarcerated in the cheerless dungeon; their families have been persecuted in cruel and revolting forms; their bodies have been tortured; and then the rack, the stake, or the gibbet has closed the scene.

But in these very circumstances of trial and affliction, the divinity of truth, the preciousness of Christ, and the triumphant power of his grace, have been most gloriously manifested. The calm self-possession, the lofty faith, and the exultant joy of the martyred followers of

Christ, have brought a vast revenue of glory to God. From many a prison-cell, from many a bloody cross, and from the midst of the devouring flame, songs of rapturous praise have risen to God.

The *results* of these sufferings, also, have been overruled, so as to bring glory to God. "The blood of the martyrs has been the seed of the church." All Christian people are called to suffer, as well as to serve. But serving or suffering, living or dying, their ultimate aim is to glorify God. Whether they "follow Christ" in a course of obedience, or follow him to the cross, is a matter of secondary consideration, if they can but glorify God.

"And when he had spoken this, he saith unto Peter, Follow me." As if he would tell him that his duty was the same under all circumstances. All his work was to follow Christ. All his usefulness depended on this. All his happiness would be secured by this. And Peter believed his Lord,—cheerfully submitted to his will. He entered the path pointed out to him; and, although Christ showed him the bloody cross at the end of it, he followed on, and followed to the death.

SCENE IX.

HEALING A BEGGAR AT THE BEAUTIFUL GATE OF THE TEMPLE.

“Now Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour. And a certain man lame from his mother’s womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms of them that entered into the temple; who seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple asked an alms. And Peter, fastening his eyes upon him with John, said, Look on us. And he gave heed unto them, expecting to receive something of them. Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk. And he took him by the right hand, and lifted him up: and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength. And he leaping up stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God.”—Acts iii. 1–8.

WE propose to conduct you, dear reader, by a somewhat circuitous route, to this Beautiful Gate of the Temple. We proceed to Jerusalem, by way of Corinth, and gaze on the Beautiful Gate in the light of a burning city.

In the palmy days of Corinth, it was by far the most splendid city in Greece. Sumptuous buildings of every description, comprising palaces and temples, theatres and porticoes, adorned it. No city was so rich in sculpture,

paintings, and works of art in the precious metals. The riches and magnificence of the city led to pride, luxury, effeminacy, and vice of every description among its inhabitants.

About one hundred and forty-six years before Christ, this city was destroyed by the Romans. After it was thoroughly pillaged, fire was set to all the corners of it at the same time. The flames grew more violent as they approached the centre, and at last, uniting there, made one prodigious conflagration. Various treasures, concealed and otherwise, were now discovered: quantities of gold, silver, and copper melted in the intense heat, and, mingling, ran down the streets in streams of insufferable brightness. When the flames were extinguished, a new metal was found, produced by the mixture of many, in this terrible fire. This new metal, which could never afterwards be imitated by art, received the name of "Corinthian brass," and was esteemed in after ages more precious than gold or silver.

Now look at the Beautiful Gate of the Temple. It is made of this Corinthian brass. Josephus tells us there were nine gates to the temple, that they were all richly adorned with silver and gold, but that the one called "Beautiful" was more magnificent than any of the others, both as to its dimensions, and the material of which it was composed. The destruction of Corinth has furnished one of the richest ornaments of the temple of God.

To this gate a poor lame man was daily carried by his friends, that he might receive the charities of the multitude going to, and returning from, the temple. It has been observed, that among the ancients there were no hospitals for the afflicted, and no almshouses for the poor. The poor were therefore entirely dependent on the charity of those who were in better circumstances. And with a view to bring their case under the notice of as many persons as possible, the afflicted and the poor were set in all places of public resort. They were found on the highways, and at the gate of the rich man's dwelling, in any and every situation where they could attract attention, and solicit help. The Beautiful Gate of the Temple, through which hundreds and thousands of people were constantly passing, would be one of the most favourable places for begging; and that, not only from the multitudes frequenting it, but from their being, as we may fairly suppose, more or less under the influence of religious feeling, and thus inclined to acts of charity and kindness. Besides this, there was an influential class of persons among the Jews, who, loving the praise of men for their good deeds, were anxious to perform them in the most public places. The Pharisees "gave alms that they might be seen of men:" and such a resort as the Beautiful Gate of the Temple furnished the very finest opportunity for the ostentatious parade of their charity.

The miraculous healing of this lame man is only one of the many signs and wonders which the Apostles

performed at Jerusalem. And, probably, this one is selected in consequence of the various particulars connected with it being so generally known to the people, and from its having produced so great a sensation in the public mind,—a sensation which is easily accounted for by the well-known peculiarities of the case; as, for example, the utter incurableness of the man by ordinary means, the impossibility of collusion or imposition, the instantaneous and perfect cure without the use of human means, and in the presence of multitudes who could not be deceived as to the fact. Nothing could be more complete, satisfactory, or manifestly divine; and the impression it produced was deep and wide among the inhabitants of Jerusalem.

In general, it may be observed that the miracles wrought by the Apostles of our Lord were wrought in confirmation of the doctrines which they were commissioned to preach. And it will be recollected, that our Lord himself frequently referred to his miracles as supplying irrefragable evidence of the divinity of his mission and doctrine. “The words that I speak unto you, I speak not of myself; but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works. Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me: or else believe me for the very works’ sake.” And now that the Apostles have gone forth in his name, and at his bidding, to preach the doctrines he had taught them, he goes with them, “confirming the word by signs following.” Apostolic miracles, there-

fore, were designed to establish the truth of apostolic doctrine, and the divine authority of apostolic commission. This evidence of miracles is as plain as it is conclusive and satisfactory. If we see a man do that which is confessedly above and beyond the ordinary powers of nature, that which is only possible to Him who created all things, and who upholdeth all things by the word of his power, we cannot but conclude that God is with him, and testifies in this manner to the truth of what his servant says, and to the authority with which he says it. In this arrangement our faith is made to stand, not in the wisdom of man, but in the power of God.

We can easily see that miracles were necessary at the commencement of a new dispensation of truth and grace to the world ; and that the persons employed in the introduction of the new system, should be authenticated in this particular way ; but it by no means follows that a continuance of those miracles is required. The *divinely-inspired record of the miracles* once wrought for such purposes is abundantly sufficient. If we are sure that the account is true, we are, for all practical purposes, in the same position as the persons before whose eyes the miracles were originally wrought.

On this ground we are warranted to reject the lying wonders of a false and apostate church, and indignantly to repudiate her claims to the miracle-working power. A sufficient number of such prodigies were accomplished, and an account of them, absolutely true in all particulars,

has been furnished to us, by the inspiration of Almighty God himself; and nothing more in this line is called for; nothing more is done. In regard to the alleged miracles of the Church of Rome, we do not trouble ourselves to point out the flimsiness of her claims, or to expose the trick and jugglery of her Priests and pseudo-saints. The day of miracles is past. They accomplished, by the will of God, their purpose, and were then withdrawn, as no longer needed. Away, then, with the hollow and impudent impostures of a Church which seeks to bolster up its pretensions, its falsehoods, and its villany! We laugh at the puerility of a winking picture; and any thing more serious in this line of things we denounce as a juggle and a cheat.

We shall now proceed carefully to note the particulars of this miracle of healing; the effect produced upon the public mind; the sermon preached about it in Solomon's porch; and the important consequences immediately resulting to the Apostles themselves.

I. This miracle was wrought at the ninth hour, or about three in the afternoon. Evening prayer was offered up at this hour; and the Apostles were accustomed daily to attend the devotional services of the temple. This they did with a view to the maintenance and increase of their personal piety, and also for the purpose of improving the opportunities afforded there, for preaching Christ and him crucified, to the multitudes who assembled for religious worship. They were instant in season and out of

season, and have left us an example every way worthy of imitation.

The lame beggar who was daily laid at the Beautiful Gate of the Temple, must have been well known to the people who resorted thither: indeed, the mass of those who dwelt in Jerusalem, must have been familiar with his personal appearance, and with the nature of his affliction. Under these circumstances, therefore, they were in a position to judge satisfactorily of the realities of the miracle; and it would be plainly impossible to impose either upon the man himself, or upon the multitudes who knew him. He had been "lame from his mother's womb." He had never been able to walk, and he was now above forty years of age. We have every reason to suppose, that, during this long period, all ordinary means had been employed, with a view to giving strength to his limbs, and curing him of his lameness. But every thing had failed. His case had become hopeless. The resources of the healing art had proved inadequate to his case, and he was a confirmed cripple. The only thing his friends could now do for him, was, somehow or other, to put him in the way of obtaining a supply of the necessities of life. He was unable to earn a maintenance for himself: his friends were, probably, not in circumstances to support him; and they therefore carried him daily to the gate of the temple, and laid him there, that he might have an opportunity of drawing upon public compassion. It cannot be doubted that, in such a case as this, a man is entitled to public

support. Whether this particular way of procuring that support—begging at the gate of the temple—was the best way, may be fairly questioned. But it was the common way of managing such matters among them, and we need not quarrel with it.

This poor cripple, “seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, asked an alms.” It is doubtful whether he had any acquaintance with the Apostles, or knew who the two men were, who were now approaching him; and we have no reason to suppose that he made application to them, with any idea that they were either more kindly disposed than others, or that they were better able to help him. He asked of them an alms, as he would have done of any one else; and all that he could expect to receive, was an ordinary charity. Nor, perhaps, would it be correct to say, that he *expected* even that. He asked for it; but it did not by any means follow that he should receive it. If it fared with him as it fares with a beggar among us, he no doubt oftener *asked* than he *received*; and, if he had no personal knowledge of the Apostles, he would be about as well prepared for a denial as for an alms.

We are the more careful to notice this particular, in order to show that this poor man’s mind was not exercised in any unusual way, at the moment of making his request. This fact is of importance, as it contributes to place the miracle of healing which was now wrought upon him, above the range of those singular occurrences, illustrative

of the power of mind over matter, by which some, professing themselves to be wise above what is written, endeavour to explain the facts now under consideration. The poor man's mind was calm,—unmoved, except by the desire of charity. He was at the moment the subject of no unusual mental emotion : he was engaged in his everyday occupation: and, as far as his personal knowledge went, he was addressing his petition to two ordinary men, from whom he had nothing to look for but alms.

We have no difficulty in admitting, that the mental emotions have a powerful influence upon the physical system; that a highly-excited imagination exerts a mysterious power over the body; and especially when that excitement has been suddenly produced. As, for example, by the abrupt communication of some terrible calamity, or by the sudden discovery of some frightful danger, or by the unexpected hearing of some extraordinary piece of good news. In such circumstances, the passion of grief, or fear, or joy, is intensely, and we might say, as to degree, unnaturally excited. The individual may be, for the time at least, superior to the feeling of bodily infirmity, pain, or disease; nor do we scruple to admit the truth of certain accounts, which show that, not only a temporary, but a permanent, cure of infirmity or disease has followed upon this suddenly-produced and extreme excitement. But when we are asked to explain the wonderful things recorded in the New Testament on this principle, and to give up all idea of the exercise of a divine power, we must

beg to be excused. Our faith, or rather our credulity, is not sufficient for this. The cause assigned is altogether inadequate to the effect produced. It is impossible to account for the blind receiving sight, and the dead being raised, on any such principle as this. And we are compelled, in reading over the sacred narratives of these wonderful works, to say with the magicians of Egypt, when they saw the results of their enchantments, immeasurably distanced by those which followed the uplifting of the rod of Moses and Aaron, "This is the finger of God."

But, at any rate, the case before us must be explained upon a different principle from that to which we have now alluded. Here, there was no mental excitement at all; no sudden emotion, or highly-wrought imagination. The beggar was in his ordinary state of mind; and neither thought of, nor wished for, any thing out of the ordinary way. He asked alms of Peter and John; and when they said to him in reply, "Look on us," he did so, "expecting to receive something of them," such as he was accustomed to receive of the kind and charitable.

Nor was there in this particular instance the exercise of faith, so far as the man himself was concerned. It is very likely, indeed, that he might have heard of Christ and of his wondrous works. But whether he believed in Christ, we have no means of knowing. The probability is that he did not. And we are quite sure that, up to this point in the narrative, there was no faith in the Lord Jesus thought of. And even when Peter had said to him, "In

the name of Jesus of Nazareth, rise up and walk," he does not appear to have been particularly moved. He did not promptly respond; he made no effort to rise up, as we gather from the account, until "Peter took him by the hand and lifted him up." All the faith exercised was that of the Apostles. The man was merely passive; and we are shut up to the conclusion, that the cure of his lameness was the result of a power altogether extraneous to, and independent of, himself.


Peter, fastening his eyes upon him with John, said, "Look on us." The Apostles' intense and meaning look, together with the words accompanying it, immediately arrested the beggar's attention, and awakened his hope. "He gave heed unto them, expecting," naturally enough, "to receive something of them." And not only was the poor man's expectation reasonable in itself, but we may fairly suppose that it would be all the greater from the formality of Peter's manner and address. These were calculated, not merely to make the beggar think that Peter and his companion were about to give him something, but something out of the usual way; an alms much greater than he was accustomed to receive. He may look for, not a mite, or a farthing, but at least a *denarius*; perhaps even more than that.

How strangely, then, must the words of Peter have sounded in the poor cripple's ears! How damaging to his hopes! "Silver and gold have I none." Peter told him in effect, that, in respect of money, he was as poor as

himself. And being so, we may observe, that it would have been most cruel on the part of Peter, to have led this man to hope for money when he had none to give him, if he had not felt assured that he had it in his power to satisfy the man with something unspeakably more valuable. One is tempted, for a moment, to speculate upon the beggar's thoughts, when he heard Peter say, "Silver and gold have I none." "What does the man mean? Does he intend to mock me in my sorrow? It is true that I am only a poor cripple, supported by public charity; but surely that gives no right to insult me, or to this man so cruelly to tantalize me. Why did he deliberately create an expectation which he knew he had no means of gratifying? If, when I spoke to him, he had gone on his way, without condescending to notice me at all, that would only have been what I am used to; if he had passed through the gate into the temple without heeding my application, he would only have done as many others daily do, and I should have thought no more of him. Many persons go past me while I sit here, too proud to notice me at all. Others pass by me with averted eyes; they are evidently offended at the sight of a cripple-beggar lying at this beautiful gate. They pass me, as if my presence was a wrong, my appearance an offence, my touch pollution; they pass by me on the other side. But this man looked kindly on me, and replied to my petition; he bade me look on him and his companion, and what else could I suppose, but that he was about to give me

something? Yet now he says to me, 'Silver and gold have I none.' I thought there was kindness in his heart, but there is cruelty; I thought his words betokened good, but I am disappointed. O why does he thus so unfeelingly mock me?"

Leave we the beggar for a while to his troubled thoughts; and let us consider Peter's words, "Silver and gold have I none." Was Peter singular in his poverty? Far from it. God hath chosen the poor of this world. Multitudes of his children, whom he favours with his richest spiritual blessings, are, with respect to temporal things, in a position to adopt the Apostle's language. And do we not know that many of the most distinguished servants of Christ have been found in the lower walks of life? Have not many of the holiest, most gifted, and useful among men, been so limited in their worldly resources, as to be distressed by scenes of suffering and destitution, which they were compelled to witness, but were unable to relieve? They would not withhold the tear of sympathy, the word of comfort and of hope, the fervent prayer to heaven in their behalf; but tears, and words, and prayers were, alas! all they had to give. It would be their joy to clothe the naked, feed the hungry, shelter the homeless, and minister to the sick; but they have not the means; they are compelled to say, "Silver and gold have we none."

"Silver and gold have I none:" this was the language of an Apostle  Jesus Christ. The servant is, in this

particular, as his Master. "The foxes have holes," said Peter's Lord, "and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay his head." Nevertheless, the poverty of Peter did not interrupt him in the prosecution of his evangelical labours; it did not lessen, in any way, his eminent qualifications for the duties of his sacred office; it did not hinder him from being successful in winning souls to Christ. Was St. Peter less wise, or less gifted; was his ministry less edifying or powerful, because he was poor? Nothing of the kind. And why should the ministry of the man, in our day, who has risen from the ranks of the poor, be less attractive than that of *the respectable man*,—the man of *wealth* and of *family*? Or why, because, according to the arrangements of the church, he occupies a subordinate position, with restricted means, should his ministerial services be more lightly esteemed, than those of his richer and more elevated neighbour? The poor Curate's preaching may be not only equal, but, in every important respect, it may even be superior, to that of the Rector, the Dean, or the Bishop.

"Silver and gold have I none:" so said the Prince of the Apostles, the Head of the Church, and the Vicerent of Christ. How stands the matter with his pretended successor? Has the man who seals with the seal of the fisherman succeeded to the fisherman's poverty? Is he of Rome in a condition to say, "Silver and gold have I none?" Far from it. Thomas Aquinas, surnamed

“the Angelical Doctor,” who was highly esteemed by Pope Innocent IV., going one day into the Pope’s chamber, where they were reckoning large sums of money, the Pope, addressing himself to Aquinas, said, “You see that the church is no longer in an age in which she can say, ‘*Silver and gold have I none.*’” “It is true, holy Father,” replied the Angelical Doctor; “nor can she now say to the lame man, ‘*Rise up and walk.*’” This sharp and truthful answer must have greatly disturbed the serenity of His Holiness the Pope. The Romish Bishop is any thing but poor. Indeed, we may venture to assert, that if the being able to say, “Silver and gold have I none,” were an indispensable qualification, there would be few candidates for St. Peter’s chair. The Pope of Rome—the so-called successor of St. Peter—has wealth enough at his command to feed and clothe all the beggars in Christendom, and that for life. His study has been to make himself, and the church with which he has to do, as unlike St. Peter as possible. Neither he, nor the army of Cardinals, Archbishops, Bishops, or Priests, who serve under him, have any idea of serving for nothing. They neither speak nor act without a fee. “No penny, no *pater noster*,” has been Rome’s principle of action for ages; and she has managed to acquire possession and control of silver and gold in abundance. Her Priests will forgive sins, but only for money; they will free souls from the pains of purgatory, but not without money. A system of taxation, barter, and extortion, fills the coffers of Rome, and drains

and impoverishes her dupes, from baptism till death. "The labourer is worthy of his meat:" so said the Redeemer; and it is the Church's duty to maintain the ministry of Christ. The men whom he has set over you, —who care and watch for your souls,—should be provided for. The Lord hath ordained that they "who preach the Gospel, should live of the Gospel." The men of this sacred calling may reasonably say, "If we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great thing if we shall reap your carnal things?" But when the office is filled for a morsel of bread; when the love of filthy lucre predominates; when the fleece is more cared for than the flock; when things sacred are sold for gain; when the mercenary Priest grinds and extorts at the bedside of the dying; when he outrages all the charities of the Gospel, and threatens to permit the departed spirit to endure the fancied tortures of burning and freezing, in purgatory, for ever, unless the fees are forthcoming; then away with him!—Peter knows nothing of him; there can be no connexion between a man like this and the Apostle of whom we speak.

But we must proceed with Peter's address to the beggar, "Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have, give I thee." The man asked for alms; he expected nothing else, and probably would be at a loss to imagine what else could be given to him that would be of service. Little thought he of his lameness being cured, or of those spiritual blessings with which the Apostle, as the servant

of Christ, could enrich him. A priceless boon was about to be conferred,—a work to be wrought upon him, exceeding all the skill and power of mortals to accomplish,—a work divine: but the beggar dreamed not of this. There stood before him only two men in humble garb, who, according to their own confession, were, in regard to pecuniary resources, as poor as he was himself. What could he expect? If he judged according to appearances, he had nothing to expect; but if he had known that these two men were Apostles of Jesus Christ, he would have been warranted to look for every thing that was good.

“In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth.” Peter assumes no personal authority, claims no virtue of his own: he speaks and acts as the delegate of another. He exercises faith in the Redeemer’s promise, made just before he ascended into heaven: “In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.” (Mark xvi. 17, 18.) Peter wills the healing of this man, but he wills it in the name of Christ; that is to say, *by the authority of Christ, or by the means of power derived from him.* A remarkable difference is thus manifest, between the manner in which Christ wrought miracles, and that in which his Apostles wrought them. *He* acted on his own authority; wrought the wonders *by his own power*: but *the Apostles* wrought them *in his name.* *He* was “Lord of all;” possessed of

“all power in heaven and in earth :” but *they* only acted by his authority, and never took any credit to themselves for that which they accomplished in the capacity of servants to another, and by the means of another’s power. They were jealous for their Master’s honour, and carefully ascribed to him the praise of every wondrous work.

An attentive reader of the Gospels cannot fail to observe the singularity of some of the commands addressed by Christ to persons in whose favour he was about to work a miracle. He often required them to do the very thing which the nature of their infirmity rendered physically impracticable : as, for example, in the case of the man with the withered hand. Christ said to him, “Stretch forth thy hand ;” thus bidding him to do the thing which he had not been able to do for years,—the thing, perhaps, he had never done in his life ; and for power to do which the humble and earnest application was now being made. So here, the Apostles, acting by the authority of Christ, imitate his example in this particular, and bid the lame man “rise up and walk.” The man who had been lame from his mother’s womb, the man who had never once walked in all his life, is told to “rise up and walk.” He is about to be cured of his lameness ; but the very first thing to be done, in the order of effecting the cure, is that which is only practicable when the cure is wrought. Before any change has passed upon him, before any means have been employed for his recovery, and before any strength is given to him, they say to him, “Rise up and walk.”

Should we have been surprised if he had answered to this strange command?—"I have no power to do so. Why do you trifle with me? Why do you unfeelingly taunt me with my lameness? You know that I cannot rise up,—that for me to walk is impossible." He might have spoken thus in reply, and with manifest plausibility. But he knew better; and, instead of demurring, he tried; instead of arguing, he obeyed; and the cure was instantly effected.

And is it not thus also with regard to moral and spiritual duties? Though altogether incapacitated for them by our sin, we yet are told to do them; and the doing of them is essential to our deliverance from sin. The sinner is commanded to repent, to believe, to turn from sin, and to lead a holy life. Now all these are quite as impracticable to the sinner, as to "rise up and walk" was to this lame beggar. Nevertheless, it is our duty to do these things, because God bids us to do them; and, obeying his commandments, we shall find them, though naturally difficult, graciously easy; our attempts will be as truly successful as was that of this lame man to "rise up and walk." Nor is there any thing unreasonable in this. He who bestows upon us blessings of which we are wholly undeserving, has an undoubted right to bestow those blessings in his own way; and to prescribe such things as may serve to test our submission to his authority, and our confidence in his love and power. At the same time, we may be well assured that what he enjoins upon us, he will graciously enable us to do. He is not "an hard

master, reaping where he has not sown, and gathering where he has not strawed." He bids the weak accomplish a feat of strength, but then he gives him strength to do it. That which he commands, though physically impracticable, he gives us grace to accomplish without difficulty. And, perhaps, we shall not greatly err, if we regard the action with which Peter accompanied his words to the cripple, as significant of this: "He took him by the right hand, and lifted him up." There was nothing in thus taking him by the hand, to effect the cure; but it was in some sort an intimation of the help he should receive from Christ, by whose power he was about to be healed.

"Immediately his feet and ankle-bones received strength; and he, leaping up, stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God." The cure was instantaneous and complete. Irrefragable proofs were given on the spot. The lame man at once did every thing to demonstrate the miraculous change. He rose up, he stood, he walked, he leaped, and gave the praise to God. Here was a literal fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy: "Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing." It has been well observed, that there was more in this miracle than merely giving strength. The art of walking is slowly learned in ordinary cases; long practice is necessary to acquire it. But the work of Christ is perfect: he imparts strength; and, in the same moment, the man who had been lame from his mother's womb, is able to walk.

This whole account is natural, and beautifully simple. The poor man, exulting in his newly-acquired strength, pours out the fulness of his heart in praise to God. Elastic, sound, and vigorous, he leaps or walks; and, instinctively feeling that the power which had wrought so marvellous a change upon him was divine, he enters the temple, and, with a gladsome heart, presents his offering of grateful love to Him who had made him whole. Peter and John have been the instruments of doing him this great service; but, conscious that they had not healed him by their own power, he gives the praise at once to Him in whose name they had professedly wrought this miracle. Our good is all divine; all glory therefore be to God. Whether temporal or spiritual blessings fall to our lot, his hand bestows them: to him give thanks. With regard to the blessings of salvation, the light, the peace, the love, the hope, and joy of the Gospel, though brought to us by the instrumentality of our fellow-men, are all the gifts of God. "Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but Ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man?"

We can more easily imagine than describe the effect produced by this miracle upon the minds of those who witnessed it, and upon the public mind at large. "They were filled with wonder and amazement at that which had happened." In the circumstances of the case there was every thing to convince the judgment, and to affect the heart; and we cannot wonder that a most profound

sensation was awakened among the inhabitants of Jerusalem. The man was well known; his lameness was unquestioned; he could not be imposed upon: there was no opportunity for collusion on the part of the Apostles; the thing was done in broad day-light, in the most public place and manner, in the presence of a multitude of people: there was, in fact, no possibility of deception; and at the same time it was plainly impossible that this cure could have been effected by ordinary or natural means. The hand of God was manifestly in it: his power had been remarkably put forth, and the people gave glory to his name. The men who were the most competent to form a correct judgment, could not deny the fact, could not say any thing against it. The Priests and the Sadducees were most anxious to detect any flaw in the case, to find out any thing which might help to justify their unbelief and opposition: but they searched and laboured in vain. The most rigid scrutiny was instituted: but no room could be found for the carping and cavils of an infidel. There was no degree of uncertainty as to the facts. There was no lack of witnesses, and nothing against their credibility. There was no doubtfulness as to the effect produced upon the man: all was clear, full, conclusive, and most satisfactory; so much so, that, against their wish, against their will, and against their malice, they unanimously agreed in this, their recorded verdict: "That a notable miracle hath been done by them, is manifest to all them that dwell at Jeru-

salem; and we cannot deny it." Their inveterate prejudice against Christ, and their malignant opposition to his doctrine, would have led them to deny this miracle, if they could have done so on any pretext whatsoever.

In noticing the effect produced in the public mind by this miracle, we are naturally led to compare it with the effect produced by the miracles of Christ. Certainly, some of those were more extraordinary than even this; but no such deep and wide-spread conviction seized upon the minds of men. A few believed; but the multitude remained in unbelief. The people were "amazed, and wondered greatly," at the things they saw; but they did not generally, as in this instance, glorify God. May we not suppose that the more plentiful influence of the Holy Spirit, subsequent to the Day of Pentecost, disposed the understandings of men to receive the truth more readily, and rendered their hearts more susceptible of divine impressions, so that they were more deeply affected by a miracle now than they were then? They understood it better, and felt the force of the appeal which it made to them in behalf of Christ, whose power and grace were thus exemplified.

"As the lame man which was healed held Peter and John, all the people ran together unto them in the porch that is called Solomon's, greatly wondering." Before we listen to Peter's sermon, it may be well to notice the place in which he delivered it. The temple of God at Jerusalem, with all the courts pertaining to it, was sur-

rounded by a massive wall of great height. On the inside of this wall, and between the gates which led into the temple, were various covered walks, piazzas, or porches. These porches varied in width from twenty to forty feet, and were paved with marble of various colours. Their costly cedar roofs were supported by numerous marble pillars of immense size and beautiful workmanship. These galleries, or porches, afforded an agreeable shade from the scorching sun, and a covert from the wind and rain. The porch called "Solomon's" was situated on the east side, and was distinguished from all the others by its grandeur and beauty.

Into this piazza, capable of containing hundreds of people, the crowd now rushed, that they might gaze upon the man so marvellously healed, and upon the men who by the power of God had performed so signal a miracle. It is very likely that many of these persons were only influenced by curiosity; but there were others, and probably not a few, whose minds were divinely and deeply impressed, and who were therefore in a state of gracious preparation to listen with advantage to Peter's appropriate and masterly discourse. A large congregation was soon gathered in the porch, and our Apostle had a glorious opportunity of preaching Jesus. Nor did he fail in the due improvement of it. He preached a noble and effective sermon. His word was with power, and with the Holy Ghost; and many were converted that day in Solomon's porch. The text which St. Peter preached

from was this miracle of healing: he pointed to the man no longer a cripple, but restored to perfect soundness, and told them by what power the good deed had been accomplished; only first disclaiming all personal virtue, and endeavouring to remove a false impression, which he had reason to believe had been produced. Every eye in that vast assembly was turned earnestly upon Peter and John. The intense gaze of wonder and of admiration seemed to indicate that the people thought the Apostles more than men; that they were regarded as transcendently superior to all others; and therefore were they able to put forth this mighty power. But Peter would not suffer them to labour under this misapprehension. He was jealous for his Master's honour, and began his address by saying, "Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this? or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk?" What a fine opportunity for an impostor,—for one who sought only selfish ends, who was labouring for reputation, influence, and wealth! The people were now disposed to give the Apostles all the credit: but the Apostles were not disposed to take it, or any part of it. And Peter at once corrected their mistake. *He* had no power to do a thing like this; and the power by which he had instrumentally done it, was not delegated to him because of his superior piety. They must not, therefore, think of Peter and his companion at all, but only of *Him* in whose name the miracle had been wrought.

Peter would have them understand that he was not a setter forth of strange gods : he spoke to them of the only living and true God, “the God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers.” He tells them that he whom they delighted to call *their God*, had glorified his Son Jesus in the very miracle which had so awakened their admiration. He declares their grievous sin in denying the Lord Jesus, in demanding his punishment, even after his innocence had been established, and Pilate his Judge, finding no fault in him, was determined to let him go. Jesus was “the Holy One and the Just ;” but they had wickedly preferred a murderer to him, and killed “the Prince of life.” He tells them farther that this same Jesus had been raised from the dead, and had by his power achieved the miracle of healing which they had just witnessed : “His name, through faith in his name, hath made this man strong, whom ye see and know : yea, the faith which is by him hath given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all.”

Having thus set forth their sin, and exhibited the various aggravating circumstances under which it had been committed, he then, with the most touching tenderness, addresses them as his “brethren,” and puts in a plea in mitigation of their enormous guilt : “I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers.” They were ignorant of the character and claims of him whom they had so unworthily and so unjustly treated. Their crime was great ; but some palliation is found in the fact of

their ignorance. Peter pleads here in the spirit of his Divine Master, who, amid the agonies of death upon the cross, prayed, saying, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."

It is, indeed, true that they might have been better informed. They ought to have known Christ. He had given them sufficient proof of his Messiahship; and they ought to have received him as the Anointed of God, and the Saviour of the world. But their minds were filled with prejudice: the god of this world had blinded them. They were grievously disappointed in their expectation as to Messiah's character and office. They looked for a temporal Prince. They expected Messiah to come in regal splendour and power; that he would deliver their nation from the Romish yoke, and exalt it to grandeur among the kingdoms of the earth. But how different was the advent and the character of him who claimed to be the long foretold and looked for! He rose out of obscurity; he was meek and lowly; he was poor among men; he set up a kingdom purely spiritual, abrogated the Mosaic economy, and predicted the destruction of the temple, and the termination of the Jewish nation and polity. Their fond hopes were thus dashed to the ground, their national vanity was deeply wounded, and all their religious prejudices were shocked. And then, headed by the Priests, they met the anointed Saviour with violent, inveterate, and malignant opposition, nor ceased till they had nailed him to the cross. A thick veil

came over their hearts, and they knew not "the Lord of glory." St. Paul gives us to understand that, had they known, they would not have crucified him. (1 Cor. ii. 8.)

Peter takes the fact of their ignorance as an abatement from their fearful crime, but not as exonerating them from guilt. His depiction of their sin is most vivid, and his grouping of the various aggravations of it most appalling. Then comes the earnest exhortation, "Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord." To encourage them in their application for mercy, he reminds them of God's peculiar favour towards them as his chosen people: "Ye are the children of the Prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed." And now Peter's earnest and powerful sermon draws to a close. The last words are, "Unto you first,"—in fulfilment of the Saviour's instructions to preach repentance and the remission of sins among all nations, "beginning at Jerusalem,"—"Unto you first God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities."

How much longer the earnest and eloquent preacher might have continued his discourse, we have no means of determining; but he was suddenly and violently interrupted. The breathless stillness pervading the congregation in Solomon's porch, as they hung upon the impass-

sioned words of Peter, was disturbed by the measured tramp of advancing soldiery. The Captain of the temple, accompanied by his guard, came to arrest the preacher. The whole scene changes in a moment. Peter's voice is hushed,—the crowd disperses,—the Apostles are seized, and the guard marches them off to prison.

But how is this? What offence have the Apostles committed? Why should such good men be imprisoned? *Why?* Because they, being only Galilean fishermen, have presumed to teach the people, *that* being the exclusive work and prerogative of the Priest. Unauthorized teachers must not be allowed; the priestly province and order must not be invaded by unlettered and unofficial men. “*Why put them in prison?*” Ask the Sadducee this question; and he will tell you, it is because these men preach the doctrine of the resurrection, which the Sadducees altogether disbelieve. Peter and his companion say, that Jesus is risen from the dead; and they adduce a variety of argument and proof in support of their statement. The men must be silenced, or the people will be convinced. Do not listen to them, do not argue with them, put them in prison, and so make an end of it.

Poor misguided men! They thought they could bind the truth by binding its Ministers; that they could prevent the conversion of the people by incarcerating the Preacher. But he that sat in the heavens laughed at them: the Almighty had them in derision. Probably these Priests and Sadducees had made all haste to the

tower of Antonia, where the soldiers were stationed ; and, by alleging that a tumult was likely to be raised among the people by the preaching of the Apostles, had succeeded in getting the temple-guard to interfere and take the offender into custody. Nevertheless, whatever haste they might have made, the mischief which they had apprehended was already done ; the Holy Spirit had carried home the truth to the hearts of the people, so that “ many of them that heard the word believed.” There is neither counsel nor might against the truth and the Spirit of God. The Gospel of Christ will prevail against civil, ecclesiastical, and military power. All men shall know the truth, and by it be made free.

On the following morning Peter and John were examined before the Great Council ; and, in answer to the question proposed to them, “ By what power, or by what name, have ye done this ?” Peter, “ filled with the Holy Ghost,” made an admirable and triumphant defence : “ Ye Rulers of the people, and Elders of Israel, if we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole ; be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole. This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which has become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other : for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.”

On hearing this address, the Council was utterly confounded. They had no reply to make. The facts which had been set forth were undoubted. The arguments based upon those facts were resistless; and conscience corroborated the whole. What could they do? They had no reasons to advance; but they had authority. They were without argument, but not without power. They dared not punish, for fear of the people; but they could command and threaten. And they did so: "They commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus." But the Apostles were not to be intimidated; and they said, "Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard."

We have now, as proposed, glanced at the particulars of this miracle; at the effect produced upon the public mind; at the sermon preached about it in Solomon's porch; and at the consequences immediately resulting to the Apostles themselves: and, were it not that we have already reached the limit assigned to these observations, we should endeavour to make a useful application of the whole. As it is, we will only add, that the Apostles, while rendering obedience to the word of Christ, carefully imitated his example, and were instant in season and out of season, trying to do good to the bodies, as well as to the souls, of men. They had not worldly wealth; but they had that which was infinitely more valuable,—the

unsearchable riches of Christ. These they had freely received; and they freely gave.

Many of us may say, "Silver and gold have we none;" but we are not therefore excused from the exercise of a divine charity. The soul of man is more precious than the body. The interests of the soul are of far higher moment than are those of the body. The evils that afflict the body are great; but the miseries of the soul are unspeakably greater. If, then, you are poor in regard to this world's goods, bring out your spiritual treasures, and bestow them generously. Tell men of a Saviour's love; guide them to him, in whose salvation they will find a "joy unspeakable and full of glory." Say to them what St. Peter said to the lame beggar: "Such as I have give I thee."

SCENE X.

KNEELING IN THE UPPER CHAMBER BY THE DEAD BODY OF DORCAS.

“Now there was at Joppa a certain disciple named Tabitha, which by interpretation is called Dorcas: this woman was full of good works and almsdeeds which she did. And it came to pass in those days, that she was sick, and died: whom when they had washed, they laid her in an upper chamber. And forasmuch as Lydda was nigh to Joppa, and the disciples had heard that Peter was there, they sent unto him two men, desiring him that he would not delay to come to them. Then Peter arose and went with them. When he was come, they brought him into the upper chamber: and all the widows stood by him weeping, and showing the coats and garments which Dorcas made, while she was with them. But Peter put them all forth, and kneeled down, and prayed; and turning him to the body said, Tabitha, arise. And she opened her eyes: and when she saw Peter, she sat up. And he gave her his hand, and lifted her up, and when he had called the saints and widows, presented her alive. And it was known throughout all Joppa; and many believed in the Lord.”—Acts ix. 36-42.

WHILE reading the sacred accounts of former times, and more especially those which relate to the supernatural appearances, and the wonderful transactions, then so common, we not unfrequently experience a feeling like regret that such prodigies are now all passed away, and probably for ever. No cloud of the Divine Presence now is seen, no voice from the excellent glory heard. The stupendous

miracles which awakened the astonishment of men, constraining them to say, "We never saw it on this fashion; this is the power of God," have ceased. The written record of these things alone survives to us. Would that we could have listened to the discourses of men made for the time infallible by the immediate inspiration of God! Would that we could have seen the mighty deeds by which their doctrine was declared to be divine! But all such regret is utterly vain: nothing remains but the inspired account. And is not that enough? That there is no more, is proof sufficient that no more is needed. If we had seen and heard all that is now referred to, we could not have secured more real benefit than is to be secured by the devout and believing use of the written word. Accompanied, as that is, by a divine and all-hallowing influence, it is made to answer the same moral and spiritual purposes with respect to us, as were answered by the things themselves with respect to the individuals who heard and witnessed them. If it were possible for us now to see and hear such wondrous things, they could not make us more than "wise unto salvation:" they could not enable us to do more than rejoice with a "joy unspeakable and full of glory:" they could not more than thoroughly furnish us unto every good word and work. But all this is happily done for us by the oracles of truth, the divinely-inspired records of what was said and done in other days. "Blessed," said one of the privileged to Christ, "Blessed is the

womb that bare thee, and the paps which thou hast sucked. But he said, Yea, rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it." (Luke xi. 27, 28.)

There is another consideration which is quite sufficient to reconcile us to the absence of those wondrous things; and it is this: although the material and visible signs with which the word was formerly confirmed have ceased, the Lord Jesus is still with his church, and with his servants, accomplishing through their means a variety of spiritual wonders. By the power of the Holy Ghost he brings dead souls to life; and it may be safely affirmed that the achievements of his grace are as glorious now as were those of his power in days gone by.

There is much in the deeply-interesting narrative now before us calculated to instruct, admonish, and encourage, in connexion with the ordinary affairs of human life. Such scenes as are here described—scenes comprising poverty and sickness, death and bereavement—are being constantly presented. We have not to travel far from our own door at any time, in order to reach a house of mourning, such as that was at Joppa when visited by St. Peter. But, alas! we cannot always find so many joyous things with which to assuage our grief, as were found in the house of Dorcas. The deep shadows of the picture are not always relieved by the striking and brilliant lights which appear in this particular case. Christian love and active piety, effectual prayer and triumphant faith, are so

many gleams of sunlight upon the dark cloud of sorrow overshadowing the house at Joppa.

Our observations upon this account will relate to the scene of the miracle,—“Joppa;” the subject of the miracle,—“Dorcas;” the way in which the miracle was wrought,—“He put them forth, and kneeled down, and prayed;” the effect of the miracle on the inhabitants of the place,—“Many believed in the Lord.”

I. Joppa, or, as it is now called, Japho, or Jaffa, is one of the most ancient towns of Asia. The researches of some authors in connexion with its history would carry us back to an almost fabulous antiquity. It is alleged to have been built by Japhet, Noah’s youngest son, and from him to have received its name. But, without believing all this, the town certainly existed, and as a sea-port, at a very early period of the world’s history. It is situated on the eastern shore of the Mediterranean Sea, between Cæsarea and Gaza, and is about forty miles north-west of Jerusalem. Classical, historical, and sacred associations gather round ancient Joppa, and give it an interest which otherwise so miserable and insignificant a town could not possibly possess.

It was here that Andromeda, the daughter of Cepheus, was chained to a rock, and exposed to be devoured by a sea-monster, from which she was delivered by the valour of Perseus. It was to Joppa, as the port of Jerusalem in the days of Solomon, that all the materials employed in building the temple were brought from Tyre, and thence

conveyed by land to Jerusalem. It was to Joppa that Jonah fled from the presence of the Lord, and from thence he embarked in a ship for Tarshish, on that memorable voyage.

The town of Joppa is built on a bold headland, jutting out into the sea; and from its elevated position may be seen a variety of picturesque and beautiful prospects. There is still a considerable trade carried on between it and the neighbouring towns,—though trifling, when compared with that of former times. The present population of the place is some four or five thousand. The greater part of the inhabitants is composed of Turks and Arabs: there are also some six hundred Christians belonging to the various denominations of Papists, Greeks, Maronites, and Armenians.

The country round about Joppa is very beautiful. Nature appears in some of her most luxuriant dresses; and scenes of fertility and picturesque beauty present themselves on every hand. But the town itself is any thing but pleasing. The walls and buildings are only remarkable for their massiveness and gloom. The streets are narrow, ruinous, and dirty. Travellers find in it but miserable accommodation, and are generally glad to make their sojourn as brief as possible.

Imagine Peter now threading his way through one of the narrow and dirty streets of Joppa, toward the house of Dorcas, guided by the two men who had been sent to bring him from Lydda: and, while they are wending

their way to the place of mourning, let us endeavour to acquaint ourselves with the character and deeds of the deceased.

II. The subject of the miracle. Her name was Tabitha, or Dorcas. The former was the Hebrew or Syriac name; the latter was the Greek. The words are identical in meaning: they both signify the "Gazelle," or "Antelope." It may be observed, in passing, that it is even now customary in the East to give the names of beautiful animals to young women; and Oriental poetry abounds with the comparison of fine eyes to those of the gazelle. Probably the person whose story we are now considering obtained her name in this way: if so, then she was very beautiful, and, because beautiful, she was called "Dorcas," the "Gazelle."

But whatever may be said of the personal attractions of Dorcas, is of little importance, compared with what may be said of her mind, character, and life; these were beautiful indeed. The grace of God had made her a saint of the loveliest mould; the law of kindness was graven on her heart; and works of charity filled up her pious life. With reference to her, the words of Job might be appropriately used, "When the ear heard, then it blessed her; and when the eye saw, it gave witness to her: because she delivered the poor that cried, and the fatherless, and them that had none to help: she caused the widow's heart to sing for joy." Two things are here affirmed, in regard to her abounding and incessant kindness: "She

was full of good works and almsdeeds which she did." *She worked for the poor*,—perhaps, especially for poor widows; and *she gave them alms*. Thus, both her *money* and her *labour* were expended in supplying the necessities and promoting the comforts of the poor. And we may observe, that where there is a benevolent mind, even in the absence of pecuniary resources, a little ingenuity and effort will enable persons materially to contribute to the relief of the destitute and suffering.

These charities of Dorcas were all the more remarkable, considering the time in which she lived. Such interest in the poor was then by no means common. There were then no such systematic provisions made, and no such societies as are now established for their relief and comfort. She was before her time, and singularly good. She needed no stimulant from without. Her own kind heart and holy Christian sympathies moved and sustained her in her work of love. We would not be censorious, and yet would ask, How many are there, in our day, who are only charitable under the stimulus of example, a public meeting, a society, and report? We rejoice in the help obtained for the poor, even in this way; but, so far as the contributors are concerned, a better motive is required in order to their enjoyment of the luxury of doing good, and to their happy interest in these words: "Blessed is he that considereth the poor: the Lord will deliver him in time of trouble."

What a charming description of works of charity and

love is that which our Saviour gives us, in his discourse about the judgment-day ! He speaks of the suffering and the destitute as his representatives ; and reckons what is done for them, under the influence of Christian motive, as done for himself. Addressing those on his right hand, he says, “ I was hungry, and ye gave me meat : I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink : I was a stranger, and ye took me in : naked, and ye clothed me : I was sick, and ye visited me : I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee ? or thirsty, and gave thee drink ? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in ? or naked, and clothed thee ? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee ? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.” (Matt. xxv. 35–40.)

How desirable it seems, that persons who pursue a beneficent course, like that of Dorcas, should be favoured with uninterrupted and vigorous health, and that they should be permitted to live long upon the earth, blessing and being blessed ! In this world of ours, where sin has made privation and suffering so common, there are always round about us multitudes who need the sympathy and help of those whom Providence has favoured in respect of temporal things. But, as compared with the numbers of the needy, how few there are who could be truthfully por-

trayed in the language used in reference to Dorcas ! How small is the number of those who are “full of good works and almsdeeds !” and how badly can we afford to have any of them taken away ! Beside, might we not suppose, that persons who embody so perfectly, and with so much advantage to their neighbours, the heaven-born principle of love, would be distinguished by the God of love, and be exempted from sickness, and, as long as possible, from death ? But it is not so ; at least, not uniformly. We often see the righteous grievously afflicted, while of many of the wicked we may truly say, that they are neither plagued, nor in trouble, as other men. It is no uncommon thing to see the useful cut down, while the apparently useless are permitted to remain. Not a few, whose whole life has been one continuous act of blessing, sicken, and, as we in our short-sightedness would say, prematurely die. There is much in all this that we cannot possibly understand ; but as for God, his way is perfect ; and, in his holy Word, he has given us sufficient explanation to inspire us with cheerful and unbounded confidence in his unerring wisdom and eternal love. Neither the rewards of virtue nor the punishments of vice belong to time, but to eternity. This is the scene of probation, not of retribution. The very afflictions of this life are employed for purposes of grace. All things are wisely and graciously ordered ; though the fact remains, that neither eminence in piety, nor extent of usefulness, can ward off the attacks of sickness, or turn away death from our door. The

lovely and gentle, the pious and charitable, Dorcas sickened and died.

It is altogether vain for us to inquire concerning the nature of her sickness, or the time it lasted. The brief and simple record is, "She was sick, and died." The skill of the physician, and the ministering kindness of friends, alike proved unavailing. Her sainted spirit passed away; and the bereaved widows mourn over the lifeless body. There remain only for them now the last offices of pious friendship. The corpse is prepared in the usual manner for burial; it is washed, and laid in an upper chamber; and by it the mourners watch and weep.

How solemn a thing, and how mysterious, is death! Who can explain what it is, or point out its secret cause? Who is able to trace the connexion between the sickness of the patient, and the departure of the spirit? None. To the question, "What is life?" the only answer that can be given is, a catalogue of its various functions and phenomena; and death is explicable only by a statement of its physical effects. It is sufficient here to say, that in death there is the departure of the soul from the body, and the irrecoverable cessation of all the bodily functions. Such was the death of Dorcas. Hers was not a case of suspended animation, but of death; and no merely human agency could restore her, or bring back her departed spirit. God alone can raise the dead.

In the mean time the disciples having heard that Peter was at Lydda, they forthwith send two messengers to

him, with an urgent request that he would immediately come to them. The distance between Lydda and Joppa is only about six miles; and as the messengers were evidently sent in haste, and Peter promptly responded to their call, but little time could possibly elapse between the departure of the men and the arrival of Peter. The circumstance of the men being thus hastily dispatched for the Apostle, though trifling in itself, may help us to a probable conjecture as to the reason of their sending for him. If the men were sent after the death of Dorcas had taken place, it is difficult to account for the urgency and haste which are apparent. But if we suppose that they were sent before her death, but after signs of a fatal termination of her ailment had begun to appear,—after it had become manifest that her sickness was unto death,—then we can easily understand the haste with which they dispatched the messengers to Lydda. They did so in the hope that Peter would come to them at once, and put forth such healing power upon Dorcas as he had been able to put forth in the case of Eneas. *He* had been bed-ridden for eight years with the palsy; but was instantly cured at Peter's word. No doubt, accounts of this wonderful cure of Eneas had reached Joppa; and the friends of Dorcas, when they see her dying, quickly send for Peter, that he may come and heal her, and save them from so painful a bereavement. This conjecture will, perhaps, be thought all the more probable, if we remember that, down to this time, the Apostles had not raised

any one from the dead. It is scarcely likely, therefore, that, in sending for Peter, they could have any hope that Dorcas would be restored to life. But they might very well indulge the hope, while she was only sick, that if Peter could be brought to her, he would heal her sickness.

If we have correctly guessed at their motive in sending for the Apostle, we can readily imagine how painfully they must have felt the fact of her decease before his arrival. They have done what they could to avert this painful stroke; but it has been done in vain; their last hope is extinguished; all is over; Dorcas is dead. Having gazed awhile upon the lifeless body, and given vent to their sorrowful feeling, they attend to the last mournful duties, wash the body, and lay it in the upper chamber, ready for interment.

“When Peter was come, they brought him into the upper chamber: and all the widows stood by him weeping, and showing the coats and garments which Dorcas made, while she was with them.” This picture of the widows’ grief is peculiarly touching. Their tribute to the worth of the deceased is in tears of unaffected sorrow and in the exhibition of her works of charity. These garments are the last mementos of an affectionate and a sympathizing friend. Her kind and generous heart will respond no more to their distresses; her labours of love in their behalf are ended; and they weep. They weep for themselves and for their children, but not for her. Their

afflictive loss is her unspeakable gain. Her sainted spirit is with God.

Curiosity would fain lift up the veil that shuts out the invisible, and gaze upon the region where the spirit of Dorcas is. We would see her form, and know her state, and mark her occupation. Is she far away? Is she conscious of what is passing around? Does she behold us? Vain, vain are all such questions. *We must die to know.*

III. We come now to notice briefly the manner in which the miracle was performed.

Probably it was not yet made known to Peter that a miracle would be wrought, that Dorcas would be restored to life. There was certainly nothing in the experience of the past to lead him to anticipate this. And whether he could do more than sympathize with the bereaved, and pray for the grace of God to sustain and comfort them, he knew not; but he would ask counsel from above; and having "put them all forth, he kneeled down, and prayed."

Observe, in the first place, he sought to be alone. Why he did so, can only be conjectured. But the procedure of Peter in this particular, is very similar to that of his Divine Master, on occasion of raising to life the Ruler's daughter. (See Matt. ix. 23.) Some have supposed that Peter took this course in order to avoid the appearance of ostentation; and others, that it was to secure the greater freedom in those prayers which he felt himself moved to offer up. The number of persons in the room, their violent grief and clamorous lamentation, must of

necessity distract him, and hinder him in prayer. He therefore puts them all forth, that he might have the opportunity of pouring out his earnest supplications undisturbed. What was the specific subject of his prayer, we are not informed. It might be only, at the first, the expression of an anxious wish that God would be graciously pleased to turn this bereavement to a profitable account; that in some way or other the divine glory might be advanced. But as Peter continued to pray, and to pray, as he no doubt did, under the promptings of the Spirit of God, the things of God would be revealed to him, the purpose of God made known. The thought of Dorcas being raised to life would be presented to his mind, the desire of this awakened in his heart, the petition for it humbly, but urgently and believingly, presented; and then the deep, divine persuasion is felt that the Lord would actually raise up Dorcas by his means.

Whether this was the process passing in the mind of Peter while he knelt by the dead body, we are of course not able to affirm; nor is it of any consequence. The desire for this miracle was created, faith in the ability of Christ to accomplish it was experienced, and a divine confidence that Dorcas would be actually and presently restored to life, commanded the whole soul of Peter; and, turning to the body, he said, "Tabitha, arise." The word of the Apostle was with power. Life was communicated, the spirit of Dorcas returned to its former habitation, the eyes which had been closed in death

opened upon her restorer, and she that had been prepared for burial sat up. Peter took her by the hand, “and, when he had called the saints and widows, he presented her alive.”

“Who can imagine the surprise of Dorcas, when called back to life? or of her friends, when they saw her alive? For the sake of themselves and of the poor there was cause of rejoicing, and much more for such a confirmation of the Gospel; but to herself it was matter of resignation, not joy, to be called back to these scenes of vanity, which surely would not have been tolerable, had not a veil of oblivion been drawn over the glories which her separate spirit had enjoyed. But, doubtless, her remaining days were still more zealously spent in the service of her Saviour and her God. Thus was a richer treasure laid up for her in heaven; and she afterward returned to a more exceeding weight of glory than that from which so astonishing a providence had recalled her for a season.”*

IV. The effect produced by the miracle upon the inhabitants of the place, remains to be considered: “It was known throughout all Joppa; and many believed in the Lord.”

We are not to look upon this miracle merely, nor even chiefly, as a work of benevolence,—highly gratifying to the friends of Dorcas, and to the many poor widows to

* Wesley.

whom she had been so kind,—but as specially intended to carry with it a great moral influence in favour of Christianity. It was a demonstration of the truth, the divinity, and the power of Christ, and of his holy Gospel; and the consequence was, that “many believed in the Lord.” It would have been surprising if they had not. No clearer proof could be given of the almighty power of Christ, or of the fact, that Peter was his authorized and approved servant. And the people felt themselves shut up to the faith of the Lord Jesus.

Peter remained for some time at Joppa, probably that he might take advantage of the strong impression produced upon the people by the raising of Dorcas, and lead them to a further acquaintance with the doctrine of Christ. The public mind was now in a state of readiness to receive the truth, and Peter, no doubt, freely dispensed it. A great and effectual door was opened to him for preaching the Gospel, and in Joppa there would be many seals to his ministry; many who would be stars in his glorious crown in the day of the Lord.

Shall we be reckoned fanciful in our application of this account, if we take Dorcas as she lies in the upper chamber, with all the trappings of death about her, as a type of man in his spiritual condition; and consider Peter as representing one who only wields the ordinary power of the Gospel for a moral resurrection? The souls of men are as the body of Dorcas,—dead. They are dead in trespasses and in sins; dead to all that is holy

and divine; dead in law, and but waiting to be consigned to the death that never dies. As far as human means are concerned, the souls of men are as hopelessly dead as was the body of Dorcas. No power but that which is embodied in the Gospel—the power of Christ—can raise to holy, happy, and eternal life. But this is sufficient. “You hath he quickened, who were dead.” What the Redeemer’s power did for the body of Dorcas, it still does for the souls of sinful men.

The dead are around us in the valley. The bones are many, and, lo! they are very dry. But the Ministers of Christ are prophesying over them, and saying, “O ye dry bones, hear the word of the Lord!” Nor do they prophesy in vain. Power comes upon the slain, and they live.

SCENE XI.

IN A TRANCE ON THE HOUSE-TOP AT JOPPA.

“PETER went up upon the house-top to pray about the sixth hour : and he became very hungry, and would have eaten : but while they made ready, he fell into a trance, and saw heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending unto him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth : wherein were all manner of four-footed beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air. And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter ; kill, and eat. But Peter said, Not so, Lord ; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean. And the voice spake unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common. This was done thrice : and the vessel was received up again into heaven.”—Acts x. 9-16.

WHAT a variety of methods have been employed by the Great Governor of the universe for the purpose of making himself known to the dwellers in this out-lying province of his vast dominion, and communicating to them a knowledge of his will ! From the time when Adam heard the voice of God in the bowers of Eden, until John beheld the sublime Apocalyptic visions in the Isle of Patmos, this necessary knowledge has been in course of conveyance through every conceivable medium. Voices, visions, and symbols ; the angels and Prophets of the Old Testament,

and the Apostles and Evangelists of the New,—have all contributed to make the creature savingly acquainted with his Creator, and guide him from earth to the skies; and, now that the revelation is complete, it is deeply interesting to look back upon, and examine, the “divers manners” in which, “at sundry times,” this revelation has been made. In a careful review of the several methods employed, we perceive that each individual method has been, in itself, proof and illustration of important facts; and, in some instances, we find it difficult to determine whether the thing revealed, or the thing employed in revealing, presents the larger amount of information. Tempting as this thought is, we cannot now pursue it, and will only cite, as an example of our meaning, “the trance.” Through this medium momentous truth was made known to Balaam of old, and to the Apostles Peter and Paul; while, at the same time, the medium itself shows us the perfect access of God to the mind of man, and his unlimited control over all its faculties. The trance demonstrates that the mental powers and the bodily functions are all subject to Him with whom we have to do; and, further, that there is an action of mind independent of our physical organization.

“Peter went up upon the house-top to pray about the sixth hour.” It has often been remarked, that the houses in Judea were built with flat roofs, on which people walked, conversed, meditated, and prayed. The house-top was, in fact, a place of retirement; and thither Peter

repaired, for the purpose of praying to God. "At first he felt keen hunger; but, being earnestly engaged with God, all natural appetites became absorbed in the intense application of his soul to his Maker. While every passion and appetite was under this divine influence, and the soul, without let or hinderance, freely conversing with God, then the visionary and symbolical representation mentioned took place."*

A trance may be explained as the highest degree of mental abstraction. While it lasts, the mind is wholly withdrawn from surrounding things, and appears to act independently of the body. The bodily senses are either partially or entirely suspended; while the mind is intensely occupied with some particular train of thought, or subject of contemplation. There is an utter unconsciousness of external objects and influences; and the mind converses exclusively with spiritual and unseen things. Probably this was the condition of St. Paul, when—whether "in the body or out of the body," he could not tell, but—he heard and saw unutterable things.

To some extent this state of mind may, undoubtedly, be experienced as the result of merely natural causes. But in the case of Peter, there was evidently a supernatural influence at work. God was about to unfold to him the mystery which had been hidden for ages, namely, "That the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs, and

* Dr. A. Clarke.

of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the Gospel;" and to prepare him for this, Peter's mind is divinely drawn away from all present objects; so that he is enabled to gaze without distraction upon the vision presented to him, and earnestly to consider its meaning. It was under an influence from above, that Peter fell into this trance; and what he saw was a divine representation.

We shall now proceed to a brief consideration of the vision which Peter beheld, and of the interesting manner in which it was fully explained to him.

I. The vision: "He saw heaven opened." This phrase is considered by some to be a mere Hebraism, in which the sky above us is regarded as a solid and vast expanse, *opened*, for the purpose of allowing something to become visible, or to descend. But surely it is much more agreeable to all the circumstances of the account, to understand the language as implying the discovery to the entranced mind of Peter of the spiritual world. Assuredly that world is not far from us. Heaven is no far distant region. And although the dense medium of flesh and blood prevents us from seeing it, we have reason to believe in the possibility of its discovery to the soul. God can easily throw the mind into this "ecstasy,"—making it for the time independent of the bodily senses, and giving it a spiritual perception, to which heaven will be opened, and things invisible made manifest. This may be beautifully illustrated by the case of Elisha's servant at Dothan.

“Lord,” said the Prophet, “open this young man’s eyes that he may see. And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha.” The heavenly hosts were there before, but invisible; the young man’s eyes were opened, and he saw them. The spiritual world was opened to him, as we understand it to have been opened to St. Peter.

Peter beheld “a certain vessel descending unto him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth: wherein were all manner of four-footed beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air.” This was obviously a *vision*, and not a *reality*. The *appearance* to the *mind* of Peter was that of a great sheet, containing these various animals. There were *represented* to him such animals as were allowed for food, and also such as were forbidden by the Jewish law. Animals were divided by that law into the clean and the unclean. Of the former only might they take either for food or for sacrifice to God. This law, prohibiting the use of certain animals, was expressly designed to keep the Jewish people separate and distinct from all the nations of the earth. This object was completely secured. The people dwelt alone. And to this day, although the Jews are found in almost every kingdom, they are nevertheless a perfectly distinct people. Turbulent and rebellious as they have been from age to age, they yet have scrupulously submitted to the precepts of

the ceremonial law ; and that law has been as a middle wall of partition between the Jew and the Gentile from the beginning of their history until this very day.

Peter, as a Jew, had lived in uniform obedience to this law ; and hence, when he heard the voice saying to him, “ Rise, Peter ; kill, and eat,” he at once replied, “ Not so, Lord ; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean.”

The people thus divinely separated were favoured with peculiar religious advantages above all the nations of the world. To them were committed the oracles of truth ; among them were established the law of God and the ordinances of the true religion ; they were God’s chosen people, and he dwelt among them. But the people thus distinguished by the number and the excellence of their privileges, became high-minded and exclusive. They prided themselves on their exalted position, and looked upon all others with contempt. The Gentile was disliked and scorned ; an inveterate prejudice was fostered ; and all who were placed without the enclosure of the Jewish nation, were held to be beyond the range of Jehovah’s gracious purposes.

This prejudice was strong in the minds of Peter and his fellow-Apostles ; and although, in the great evangelical commission which they had received from Christ, they were instructed to “ go into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature,” down to this period they had only preached it to the Jews. And to a certain extent, at

least, they were right in pursuing this course. They had been plainly told to begin their ministry of mercy at Jerusalem ; but that ministry was not to end there. Some eight years had now elapsed since they received these instructions ; and the time had come for offering Christ to all, and for receiving into the church of Christ all that believed, the Gentile as well as the Jew.

Peter was to have the honour of being the primary instrument in extending the Gospel of the grace of God to the Gentiles. Indeed, he had received the “keys of the kingdom of heaven ;” and, on the Day of Pentecost, he opened the Christian dispensation by preaching the first Gospel sermon ; and now, with the same key, he is to open the Gospel to the Gentiles. As yet, however, he was not in a state of mind to do this. He requires further light and larger views. His Jewish exclusiveness is considered to rest upon divine authority ; and it can only be corrected and overcome by an equally express and positive revelation of the mind of God. Now the vision with which he was favoured, as he lay upon the house-top at Joppa, conveyed to him this further light and explicit authority.

In the vessel which he saw, there were “all manner of four-footed beasts,” &c. : that is to say, there were the clean and the unclean. Both were presented to him from heaven ; and he, being hungry, is told to “kill and eat.” An unmistakeable intimation is thus made to him, that the ceremonial distinction between the clean and the

unclean was now ended. But as yet he did not apprehend the meaning of the vision. The words addressed to him plainly implied, that he might now make his own selection from the animals before him, and freely eat of any one of them. Thus far he clearly understood the language spoken to him; but he declined to avail himself of the permission given, assigning as the reason, that he had "never eaten any thing common or unclean;" that is to say, there was a divine law forbidding him to do so; and he could not, while that law was unrepealed, eat of such animals as were now before him. Then, to remove his scruples, and to clear the way for his compliance with the command to "kill and eat," he hears the voice again, saying, "What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common." Here he is plainly told, that the law prohibiting the use of unclean animals was abrogated; and that, in fact, the ceremonial distinction between the clean and the unclean was at an end, and God had cleansed the whole. The same authority which had issued the law at the first, for wise and sufficient reasons, now sets aside the law, for reasons equally important. This was, no doubt, one design of the vision; but it unquestionably had another and far more important one; namely, to show that the distinction between the Jew and the Gentile was abolished; and that men of all nations were to be admitted into the church, just as animals of all kinds were enclosed in the sheet now let down before the Apostle. The object of the ceremonial law was to separate the

Jewish from the Gentile nations ; but the purpose of God, in that separation, had now been fulfilled, and it was his pleasure that the separation should cease. He was about to throw open the privileges of grace to all ; and therefore the law which made a distinction in favour of one particular people was abolished. It may be taken as a maxim in law, that, when the reason why a law is made ceases to exist, the law itself becomes obsolete.

We have no difficulty in understanding what passed on the house-top at Joppa ; but it was far otherwise with St. Peter. He was thrown into great perplexity ; the most careful consideration of the vision did not relieve him ; and he remained for a time in troublesome doubt as to its meaning. This will not surprise us, if we fairly estimate the circumstances of the case, as they are summarily stated by St. Peter himself : “ Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation.” This may, perhaps, be considered as an *extreme* construction of the Mosaic laws : it was, however, that which was ordinarily put upon them by the Jewish people, who regarded them as forbidding every sort of intercourse with Gentile nations. It was, therefore, extremely difficult for the Jews to conceive, that the hitherto excluded and despised Gentiles were now to be placed upon an equality with themselves ; to be admitted into their close and holy fellowship, and with them to constitute one church of the living God. This was so vast a change, in relation to a state of things

which had obtained for ages, and which was believed to have been established at the first by the divine will, that St. Peter experienced the utmost difficulty in comprehending the vision which set it forth.

But the Lord did not leave his servant long a prey to uncertainty and doubt. An explanation was very soon given to him, as pleasant as it was satisfactory. The following is the account of it : “ While Peter thought on the vision, the Spirit said unto him, Behold, three men seek thee. Arise therefore, and get thee down, and go with them, doubting nothing : for I have sent them.” While the Apostle is going down to meet and converse with these men, let us take the opportunity of glancing at what is passing in Cæsarea. There lived in that city a “ Centurion of the Roman army, called Cornelius.” He was a devout and God-fearing man, exceedingly charitable, and given to prayer. An angel appeared to him, and told him that his prayers and alms had come up for a memorial before God ; and that he must send to Joppa for Peter, who would give him all further information as to what he must do, in order to his full enjoyment of divine acceptance. Cornelius immediately dispatched two of his household servants, accompanied by a devout soldier, to Joppa. They arrived there at the very moment when Peter was earnestly endeavouring to ascertain the meaning of the vision. They had found out the house of Simon the tanner, and now stood at the gate, asking if Peter lodged there. On being introduced to Peter, these three men

delivered their message from Cornelius; and Peter consented to go back with them to Cæsarea. He did so on the morrow; and, on arriving at the house of the Centurion, he found a considerable company assembled, consisting chiefly of the kinsmen and intimate friends of Cornelius. Light now begins to break in upon the mind of Peter; and he sees that one object of the vision was to show him that he might now keep company with a Gentile, and therefore with Cornelius. "God," said he, "hath showed me that I should not call *any man* common or unclean. Therefore I came unto you without gainsaying, as soon as I was sent for: I ask therefore for what intent ye have sent for me?"

Cornelius, in reply, gave an account of the appearance of the angel to him, and of the instruction which he had received, concluding his statement with the following words: "Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God." The whole meaning of the vision is now revealed to Peter. He sees before him a congregation of Gentiles gathered together under the immediate direction of God, and for the express purpose of hearing from him the glad tidings of salvation. All doubts are cleared up; all uncertainty is at an end; the mists of prejudice pass away from his mind; the middle wall of partition between Jew and Gentile disappears from before him; his heart expands with the divine charity of the Gospel; and his loosened tongue proclaims a love that has overleaped all the cere-

monial distinctions of the past. "Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him." The Apostle has now taken "the keys" which he had received from Christ, and opens therewith "the kingdom of heaven" to the Gentiles.

The outline of this first sermon to a Gentile congregation presents us with an epitome of Gospel history, and an authoritative statement and offer of Gospel benefits. "To Him give all the Prophets witness, that through His name whosoever believeth in Him shall receive remission of sins." These were the words whereby, according to the promise of the angel, Cornelius and all his house should be saved. Nor are these tidings delivered "in word only, but in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance." Their truth is divinely attested there and then; for "while Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word."

This descent of the Holy Ghost upon these Gentiles greatly astonished the six brethren whom Peter had taken with him from Joppa. They were Jews converted to the faith of Christ, but as yet ignorant of the divine purpose with respect to the Gentiles, and under the influence of the same prejudice which had been so difficult to remove from the mind of Peter himself. Effects immediately followed this effusion of the Holy Ghost, identical with those of the Day of Pentecost. These Gentiles received

the gift of tongues, and were able, in languages which they had never learned, to magnify the Lord. Every thing clearly showed that they were now placed on a perfect equality with the Jewish converts, and that they were therefore entitled to the ordinances and blessings of the church of Christ. Peter accordingly demanded, "Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?" Baptism was the outward and visible sign; and it could not, with a shadow of propriety, be withheld from those who had so manifestly received the inward and spiritual grace. "And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord." They were thus formally and fully admitted within the sacred enclosure of the Christian church, and became the first living witnesses that "there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free; but Christ is all and in all."

Tidings of this event very soon reached the Church at Jerusalem, and produced a great sensation among its members. Much uneasiness was felt in reference to it; the conduct of St. Peter was freely canvassed; the comments upon it were altogether unfavourable to him; he was held to have been guilty of a serious innovation; and, in the true spirit of Jewish narrow-mindedness, he was warmly called to account as soon as he arrived from Cæsarea. There is a tone of indignation and censure in the terms of the charge preferred against him: "They

contended with him, saying, Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them." Peter was thus put upon his trial. But the plain and candid account of the whole affair which he was able to give, proved a triumphant defence. "He rehearsed the matter from the beginning, and expounded it by order unto them." "He related his vision; and, to show that he could not be mistaken in the interpretation of it, he represents to them that God had set his seal to it by an effusion of such spiritual gifts as had borne witness to their own separation to the work of the ministry. 'The Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning. What then was I that I could withstand God?' The argument was unanswerable; and, confirmed as it was at that time by six brethren, who had been eye-witnesses of the whole transaction, and had accompanied St. Peter to Jerusalem to bear this testimony, they acknowledged God's goodness in the event; they thankfully acquiesced in the declaration of this great extension of the Gospel, and said, 'Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.'"*

Some time after this, the question was raised whether it was not necessary, in order to salvation by Christ, that the ceremonial law should be observed, and that believers should be circumcised. This subject was discussed in what has been called "the first Council of the church," held

* Brewster.

at Jerusalem. Peter took part in the deliberations, and reminded the Council that God had made choice among them, that by his mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the Gospel, and believe; and that no difference was made between the Jew and the Gentile, God purifying the hearts of both by faith. He concluded his address with a remonstrance against the imposition of the Jewish ceremonial on the Gentile converts, characterizing it as a yoke which neither they nor their fathers were able to bear. Several others having addressed the assembly, the question was determined in favour of the exemption of the Gentiles from these ritual observances.

The whole truth of the matter was now correctly apprehended, not only by Peter, but also by them that were of the circumcision; and we might suppose the entire question finally set at rest. Instead of this, however, we find, at intervals, persons, full of Jewish prejudice, troubling the church by their endeavours to obtrude the abrogated ritual. And even Peter, clear as his views were, and consistent as had been his practice for years after the vision at Joppa, was guilty of dissembling his convictions on the subject, and acted a part most unworthy and inconsistent. This occurred at Antioch. The account of it is furnished by St. Paul in his Epistle to the Galatians, in these words: "But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed. For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles: but when they were come, he withdrew and separated

himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision. And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; inso-much that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation. But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the Gospel, I said unto Peter before them all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews?"

We infer from the absence of any statement to the contrary, that Peter felt the justness of this rebuke, and that, instead of being offended or angry with St. Paul, he meekly and Christianly submitted to his reproof. He had done wrong, and he makes no attempt to justify his conduct. Before passing away from this scene at Antioch, we may just observe how absurd it is to claim for St. Peter a supremacy, a princely authority, over the other Apostles, when we find St. Paul withstanding him to the face, and publicly censuring him; Peter, in the meanwhile, neither asserting his prerogative, nor in any way resenting the indignity so openly offered to it.

We have seen the door of the Gospel opened to the Gentiles,—opened to us. May we enter in and be saved! "God is no respecter of persons;" and if by the new and living way we approach him, he will freely bestow upon us the treasures of his love and mercy; he will permit us to feast on the provisions of his grace, and to joy in the anticipation of his glory. His church is thrown open to us; all its privileges are offered to us; and we

may pass through it to the church triumphant in heaven. At the same time we must not overlook the fact, that a solemn responsibility devolves upon us in connexion with our Gospel privilege. And we are warned by the example of the Jews: they were God's chosen people; they were favoured above all the nations of earth; but they neglected their opportunities; they rejected the counsel of God against themselves; their candlestick was removed out of its place, the door was closed against them, and the just judgments of God overtook them. So will it be with us, unless we prayerfully and diligently improve the Gospel of the grace of God, which we so abundantly enjoy.

SCENE XII.

IMPRISONED AT JERUSALEM, AND RESCUED BY AN ANGEL.

“PETER therefore was kept in prison : but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him. And when Herod would have brought him forth, the same night Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains : and the keepers before the door kept the prison. And, behold, the angel of the Lord came upon him, and a light shined in the prison : and he smote Peter on the side, and raised him up, saying, Arise up quickly. And his chains fell off from his hands. And the angel said unto him, Gird thyself, and bind on thy sandals. And so he did. And he saith unto him, Cast thy garment about thee, and follow me. And he went out, and followed him ; and wist not that it was true which was done by the angel ; but thought he saw a vision.”—Acts xii. 5-9.

IN a mountainous region we sometimes have the opportunity of witnessing most surprising and beautiful effects produced by the action of the sun upon the thick mists of the morning. We occupy, perhaps, an elevated position ; but all objects beneath and around us are concealed from our view by the dense fog. Rich and magnificent scenery is in our immediate neighbourhood ; but, for the present, no part of it is visible. There are fields waving with corn, and green pastures where the cattle recline. The river is there, and the beautiful lake ; the heath-

covered hill, and the beetling crag. All these are there, although the eye cannot penetrate the vapoury veil which covers them, and they remain invisible. But, after a while, the warm and bright beams of the sun are sufficient to disperse the dense vapours; and first one opening in the mist is made, and then another, affording us glimpses of surrounding objects. For a moment we catch sight of the lofty summit, or of the pleasant dwelling, or of the husbandman busy in the field; and we expect that the whole landscape will soon be spread out before us. But, alas! these momentary peeps through the partial openings are all we can obtain for the present. A fresh tide of mist rolls down from a neighbouring mountain, and all is hidden as before.

Is it not thus with regard to the spiritual world around us? Such a world there is, near to us; but an impenetrable veil shuts it out from our view. It is *there*, though we cannot behold it. The Bible authoritatively declares the fact of its existence; and it hath pleased God now and then to give us glimpses of the unseen region, and of the bright and happy beings who dwell in it. There have been, as it were, openings in the mist; and we have caught sight of the angels of God who are "sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation." Jacob of old had an enchanting vision at Bethel, representing the ministry of angels. He saw "a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven; and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it."

The doctrine of the ministry of angels in the affairs of men is not only plainly revealed in holy Scripture; it is also very extensively illustrated by numerous appearances of these happy spirits, and by the revelations which they made, and the works which they accomplished. A careful examination of the various accounts of these angelic appearances and missions would probably show, that there is much more disclosed, in reference to this deeply interesting doctrine, than many persons imagine. In this place, however, the general subject cannot be pursued: our attention must be confined to a single illustrative example. It is a very pleasant one, showing the disappointment of an unprincipled and cruel King, occasioned by the angel delivering an eminent servant of the Lord Jesus just when the King supposed him entirely in his power, and immediately before the time he had fixed for the prisoner's execution.

Our thoughts must be successively engaged with the prisoner, the church, and the angel: with Peter, in his hopeless condition; with the church, in her earnest prayers; and with the angel, in his wonderful procedure.

I. "In the world ye shall have tribulation." So said the Redeemer, with respect to all his followers. The form of the tribulation, and the measure of it, may considerably vary, and the hour of its coming may, in some instances, be long delayed; but the thing itself is absolutely certain. Neither excellence of piety, nor eminence of station, nor extent of usefulness, will procure exemption from the com-

mon lot. The private member and the public officer are alike called to prove, that this is not their rest; and, by "the sufferings of the present life," are quickened to seek a gracious meetness for "the glory that shall be revealed."

Among the Christians at Jerusalem we find abundant evidence of the truth of these things. We read that Herod stretched forth his hand, to vex certain of the church; that the Apostle James was killed with the sword; and that Peter was kept in prison. The King, who ought to have been the guardian of his people, busied himself with annoying and oppressing them; he destroyed their liberty, and took away their lives. All this he did, not because the individuals so treated had been guilty of any offence against the State, or of any crime against their fellow-subjects; but simply on account of their professing the name of Christ, and endeavouring to spread his doctrine. So true it is, that he that is "born after the flesh persecuteth him that is born after the Spirit." Perhaps there is nothing in which the deep, dark, and malignant depravity of human nature is more manifest than in its opposition to, and hatred of, light and love. The light which is to lead man to happiness, and the love which is to make him like God, the Blessed One, are the very things from which he turns away with cold indifference, or against which his nature is moved with instinctive aversion.

The Christians at Jerusalem embodied this light and love in their character and life; but Herod stretched forth

his hand to vex them. Peter was a burning and a shining light; and, constrained by the love of Christ, he lived and laboured but to save and make men happy; and yet the King shut up Peter's light in a prison-cell, and rewarded his love by depriving him of liberty. Herod's motive, in this evil treatment of the followers of Christ, stamps his conduct with the most revolting injustice, and the very wantonness of cruelty. He indulged his own bad passions, in vexing certain of the church, and in killing James with the sword; and then, "because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also." He did not even plead, as many tyrants do, a conscientious opposition to the doctrines of those over whom he tyrannized. But, just because he wished to be popular with the majority of his bigoted subjects,—the Jews who hated Christ,—he violated every principle of honour, of justice, and of humanity. But, verily, there is a God that judgeth in the earth; and this man became a monument of his righteous wrath. Herod was fearfully smitten at the very moment when he was inhaling the breath of popular applause. "The people gave a shout," and blasphemously said, "It is the voice of a god, and not of a man. And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory: and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost."

It may be observed, that Peter was now imprisoned for the third time, as the result of his fidelity and zeal in the cause of Christ. From the first imprisonment he was

discharged with threatenings, and with vain commands to speak no more, or teach, in the name of Jesus. On the second occasion, he was beaten, and departed from the Council, rejoicing that he was counted worthy to suffer shame for Christ. In this third instance, his death is determined upon; and every precaution appears to have been taken to prevent the possibility of escape. Perhaps these precautionary measures were adopted in consequence of the fact, that Peter had been set at liberty from his previous imprisonment in a very singular way. The Great Council was assembled early in the morning to deliberate on his case; and they sent to the prison to have him brought before them. But when the officers who were sent came to the prison, they found it shut, indeed, with all safety, and the keepers standing without before the doors; but, when they entered, they found no man within. The angel of the Lord had set Peter and his companion at liberty; and they were at that moment standing in the temple, and teaching the people.

It is very likely that this account of the means by which the Apostles had been delivered was not generally credited. It would be deemed more likely to have been effected by connivance on the part of the keepers. Herod is resolved that no such thing shall happen in this instance. Peter is put altogether beyond the reach of his friends; and arrangements are made which render all their plans and resources utterly unavailing. Herod delivered Peter "to four quaternions of soldiers to keep him."

A quaternion was a company of four ; there were, therefore, sixteen Roman soldiers, to whose safe keeping Peter was committed. These four companies would take among them the four watches, of three hours each, into which the night was divided. Of the four soldiers immediately employed in watching Peter, two were with him in the cell, and the other two were stationed outside the door. This, however, was not all. Peter was not only thus in prison, and carefully guarded by four soldiers ; but, to make surety doubly sure, he was “ bound with two chains,” between the two soldiers who occupied the cell with him. In this case, the Roman method of guarding prisoners was adopted ; and the right hand of Peter would be chained to the left hand of one of the soldiers, and his left hand to the right hand of the other.

We may now suppose that Herod feels secure of his prey, and that the bigoted Jews are quietly rejoicing in Peter’s imprisonment, and anticipating the pleasure of his public execution, as soon as the Passover feast is ended. No thought of disappointment troubles them ; and no fear of escape can for a moment be entertained. The soldiers who had charge of the Apostle knew that they must suffer death themselves, if they allowed him to escape ; and it is not likely that Peter himself had even the feeblest expectation of deliverance. If he had, he would probably have been wakeful, in anticipation of the event ; but, instead of this, we find him sleeping within a few hours of that fixed upon for his death. His spirit calmly reposes

in God ; and he cheerfully resigns himself to the divine will. He looks for no escape from the prison, except as death shall help him to it ; and he peacefully sleeps till his deliverer come.

To contemplate St. Peter in the position thus described, is at once deeply affecting, and most exhilarating. To think of a noble-minded man, whom Heaven had so manifestly honoured,—a blameless man, against whom no political or other offence was laid ; a man of the very highest moral worth, and distinguished only by his adherence to divine truth, and by his disinterested zeal and benevolence in the cause of Christ and of human happiness ; a man whose whole life was a public blessing ;—to think of a man of this style, thus incarcerated and bound, given up to the will of unjust and wicked men, within a few hours of the time fixed upon for his cruel death, about to be ignominiously sacrificed to the time-serving and unprincipled tyrant on the throne, and to the malignant bigotry of prejudiced and ferocious Jews,—all this is sad indeed. It is one of the mysteries of Providence which we vainly seek to comprehend. Nevertheless, believing in the wisdom and love which are concealed from our sight, we bow reverently, and adore.

On the other hand, there is much in this description to call forth thankfulness and joy. To see St. Peter peacefully sleeping under the circumstances ; sustained by the truth and grace which had been the theme of his public ministry ; enjoying the unutterable satisfaction which

arises from a clear conscience and an approving God; undisturbed by the near prospect of a violent death; waiting with divine tranquillity the stroke of the executioner, as that which should free him for ever from the troubles of earth, and introduce his enraptured spirit to the vision and glory of God:—to think of all this, is cheering indeed, and we cannot but glorify God in him.

It is not very clear how long the imprisonment of Peter had lasted, but probably not many days. The object was, not to punish him by loss of liberty, but to keep him in prison till it was convenient to put him to death. And the last night has set in, and only a few more hours of life remain. In the mean time, what were his friends doing? Had they forgotten him? Is he alone and friendless in the world? Are there no means by which the enlargement of Peter might be effected? Would no entreaties avail to save him? Is there no political influence that can be used? Is there no one friend at court to intercede for him? The answer to all such questions is, that the case is utterly hopeless: he must inevitably die, unless God should interfere.

And with respect to an interposition on the part of God, was there any thing to encourage the hope of the church? The Apostle James had been recently imprisoned, but God had not seen it meet to deliver him: he was killed with the sword. And what reason can be shown for delivering Peter, that could not have been shown in the case of James? He, too, was a pillar in the church,—

one whose removal seemed to endanger the stability of the church; and what more can be said of Peter? Is it not far more likely that he, too, must die a martyr's death, than that God should miraculously deliver him from the power of Herod?

There was, however, a difference between the cases of Peter and James. The difference might not, indeed, be sufficient to justify the expectation of Peter's deliverance; but it was enough to determine the church's line of duty. In all probability, James had been cut off at once, and no time allowed for either prayer or effort in his behalf on the part of the church; but it is otherwise in regard to Peter. He is kept in prison until the Passover has been celebrated, and thus opportunity is given to the church of making known her request to God by prayer and supplication. The prolonged imprisonment of Peter—the postponement of the time of his death—constitutes the church's call to prayer in his behalf. And although unaided reason and blind unbelief might readily suggest the extreme improbability that any difference would be made in favour of Peter, or that deliverance under the circumstances could be effected, the church's duty was to pray; and her encouragement might be, that God has a thousand ways, unknown to foolish and feeble man, of accomplishing his own purposes, and that nothing is too hard for him. Beside, the church could not safely conclude that, because James had been taken away, Peter would be taken also. The contrary might be the divine

intention,—that, of the two, “one should be taken and the other left.”

II. The church fully apprehended her duty, and attended to it with an earnestness and a spirit of importunity worthy of the occasion. “Prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him.” Feeling that one of its most important members, one of its most honoured Ministers, one of its divinely-gifted Apostles, was in the greatest possible extremity, and in danger of being removed from its fellowship and service, the church bestirred itself, and earnestly entreated God in his behalf. Not only did those individuals pray, whose apprehensions of the magnitude of what was at stake were clearer than their neighbours’, and whose feelings were more acute; but the church, the whole company of professed believers in Christ, the church in its collective capacity, gave itself to prayer for Peter.

The prayers of the church were special; both in regard to their character and their subject. From the time when it became known that Peter was arrested, until “the same night” in which we find him sleeping between the two soldiers, during the whole period of his imprisonment, prayer was continuously made. There were stated hours for prayer in the Jewish church; and those hours were recognised by the Christians at Jerusalem, and by the Apostles themselves, who went up to the temple at the hour of prayer: but it was not enough that those hours should be observed under the present extraordinary cir-

cumstances : the church felt called upon *to abound* in this work, and it therefore made prayer “without ceasing.”

But the idea of *continuity* in prayer is not the only one conveyed by the words, “without ceasing.” They imply, as is intimated in the marginal rendering, *peculiar earnestness* ; “*instant and earnest prayer* was made.” The word is ἐκτενής, and it occurs in its simple form only in one other passage of the New Testament. (1 Peter iv. 8.) There it is used to describe the *intense* and *abounding* love of Christians one to another, and is rendered “fervent,” —“have *fervent charity* among yourselves.” The same word, in combination, is used by St. Luke to express the special prayer of our Redeemer while enduring his agony in the garden : “He prayed,” ἐκτενέστερον, “more earnestly.” Jesus prayed then as he never prayed before : he “offered up,” as St. Paul tells us, his “supplications with strong crying and tears, unto him that was able to save him from death.” Prayer was here expressive of the deepest possible feeling, and of a vehement desire, rising almost to agony. Such prayers were now offered by the church for Peter. The whole soul was moved with the greatest intensity of desire that God would graciously interpose. And, in this instance, the “effectual fervent prayer of the righteous” availed much.

More or less of this earnestness must characterize all our applications to God, if we would be successful. The formal utterance of petitions for blessings of which the heart feels no particular need, will never prevail at the throne of

the heavenly grace. Of course this earnestness cannot be always equal in degree. Our ordinary circumstances and every day returning necessities cannot awaken it equally with the impending calamities, the unlooked-for emergencies, and the crises of human life. Earnestness will be proportioned to our appreciation of the importance, or value, or necessity of the thing prayed for, to the imminence of the danger, and the greatness of the evil, from which we desire to be delivered. In this case a painful bereavement was apprehended, a most serious loss was feared, a much-loved man was suffering, and likely to be sacrificed ; and affection, sympathy, private interest, and concern for the public good, all move the heart, stir up the depths of the soul, and find expression in *earnest* and *instant* prayer made to God “without ceasing.”

The prayers of the church were united. Individuals might, and probably did, pray to God for Peter ; but *the church prayed*. A subject of common interest called into action the collective sympathy ; a common evil threatened them, and they banded together that they might mingle their sympathies, and unitedly plead with God in earnest supplication that the evil might be averted. There are promises made with reference to the united prayers of Christian people which are not made with reference to the prayers of individuals : “If two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name,

there am I in the midst of them." (Matt. xviii. 19, 20.) The aggregate of prayer is more prevalent than the individual application. There is a cumulative force in the prayers of a company of believers, not to be found in the privacy of the closet. Earnestness is sympathetic; my faith is capable of being helped by the faith of another; my desires are intensified by the fervour with which my neighbour expresses his, and thus the spirit and the power of prayer are mightily increased.

The prayers of the church were simultaneous. The members were by far too numerous to allow of their meeting together in any one place. They therefore appear to have met in companies at the same time, but in different places. One of these companies met in "the house of Mary the mother of John, whose surname was Mark." And from Peter's instructions to convey the glad tidings of his deliverance "to James and the brethren," we may very well suppose that *they* were met in another place for a similar purpose. They had no "churches" in which to assemble, no "consecrated places" from which to offer up their prayers. But these were not essential to the acceptance of their devotion. The church prayer-meetings were simultaneously held in private houses; and God vouchsafed a gracious answer. Talk of "consecrated places;" is not every believer's heart a temple for the Lord to dwell in? Is not every place dedicated to the worship and employed in the service of God, a consecrated place? Is not that holy ground where he reveals

his presence, and permits us to commune with him? The place where God records his name, dispenses his truth, and vouchsafes his blessing, needs no further consecration. And the prayers of the pious will ascend from such a place as acceptably to heaven, and secure as blessed a response, as if they rose from the finest ecclesiastical, and ecclesiastically-consecrated, structure in the land.

We are not particularly informed as to the subject of their prayer; it is only said, in general terms, that prayer was made unto God *for* Peter; that is to say, on his account, or in his behalf. But it is natural to suppose that they prayed for the sparing of his life, for his deliverance from prison, and for his speedy restoration to his place and labours in the church. This prayer, as we have seen, was earnestly and importunately urged. And even when the case had become, humanly speaking, hopeless; when it was altogether impossible to procure the release of Peter by ordinary means, or in any ordinary way; still the church did not cease her prayers. Her hope was in God, to whom all things are possible. All forms of being are subject to him; all elements and laws of nature yield to his sovereign will: he has ten thousand ways of effecting deliverance for his people; ten thousand forces of strength are at his command; so that there is neither might nor counsel against him. The church had only to look back upon her own history to find numerous examples of divine interposition, quite equal to any thing

that could be required for Peter's release. He that divided the Red Sea, that overthrew the walls of Jericho, that discomfited Midian, and destroyed Sennacherib's mighty host, could accomplish any thing and every thing for his people. The church has ceased from man, and makes her earnest appeal to the everlasting God.

How often have we failed at the throne of grace, in consequence of yielding to a discouraging sense of the impracticability of the thing about which we were praying! The blessing was too high to be reached; the difficulty too great to be surmounted; and the duty too arduous to be fulfilled. We prayed on so long as we possessed any resources, and fancied that we could see the possibility of success. But when our all was expended in fruitless effort; when our strength was gone; a sense of helplessness and of hopelessness weighed us down, and we ceased to pray. This has been our folly. We were allowed to exhaust our own means, that our faith might be in God; our strength was permitted to fail us, that we might be in a position to give God the entire glory of our success. When brought low, we should have prayed that *He* might lift us up; when all hope in ourselves that we should be saved was taken away, *then* was the time to pray to *God* that *He* might save us. So the church in this instance understood. "Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains; and the keepers before the door kept the prison:" but unceasing prayer was made to God for him.

Observe, this was the state of things existing on the very eve of Peter's intended execution. Day after day the church had been praying, but as yet no answer had been obtained. How is this? Have their prayers been heard? Is the Great Being, to whom they have been humbly and earnestly addressed, unwilling or unable to comply with their petition? Surely, if it had been his pleasure to rescue Peter, he would have done it before this time! We cannot say that there were no misgivings in the minds of these praying people, arising out of the delay of God to answer. We can even admit that such misgivings would have been natural under the circumstances. But a reference to God's ordinary course in such a case, would have been sufficient to sustain their hope. They would have seen that many of the most signal interpositions in behalf of the saints had been deferred to the last, and that God often made the time of man's extremity that of his own opportunity. They would have learned, by such a review, that delays were by no means to be taken as equivalent to denials.

If an explanation of this procedure on the part of God is demanded, we should be disposed to give it in the form of these suggestions; not intending them, however, to apply to any one particular case, but generally to the question, "Why is the answer to our prayer deferred so long?" We require to be taught that we do not command in heaven, but are suppliants at the throne; the answer may be deferred, in order to bring us into such a

state of mind as shall enable us to appreciate and enjoy it when it comes. We have to learn that, whatever we may happen to possess, or are in any way able to do, we are nevertheless entirely dependent on God for the thing we pray for; that until every thing has been tried and found inadequate, we are not in a condition to give the whole praise to God; that he is jealous of his glory, and will not answer until we are prepared to say, "Not unto us, not unto us, O Lord, but unto thy name give we the glory."

III. All such reasons for delay as might have operated in this particular instance, have now ceased: the time to answer the church's prayer was come; and Peter was delivered by the means of an angel of the Lord. Previous to examining the particulars of the account, it may be observed generally, that holy Scripture, in all but innumerable instances, represents angels as employed in connexion with the affairs of men. In these narratives the language is neither figurative nor accommodated, but strictly literal. And if it be not literally true, that angels have been so employed, then the language of the sacred writings is altogether misleading, and our confidence in the divine origin of the book, and in the integrity of the writers of it, is seriously and unavoidably damaged. It may be confidently affirmed, that no man who, with an unbiassed mind, reads over this account of Peter's deliverance from prison, can possibly arrive at any other conclusion, than that it was preternaturally effected, by the

ministry of an angel; and that the writer of the account intended to represent the deliverance in this light. If no more is actually meant, than what certain commentators would have us to believe; namely, that Peter was freed from his chains, and enabled to leave the prison, by some means unknown to himself, and that he, therefore, under the influence of a mere vulgar Jewish prejudice, conveniently ascribed his deliverance to the ministry of an angel;—if no more is really meant than this, then we say, the whole story is unworthy of consideration; and it were worse than foolish to take the author of it as a guide in matters of serious concern. That writer is dishonest, who uses language, the natural meaning of which is contrary to truth and fact, unless in some way he gives us intimation, that he so uses words in an accommodated, a non-natural, or figurative sense. No such intimation is given here. We have a plain and literal account of what actually took place.

Within the last few years a class of men has risen up in Germany, and even among ourselves, whose chief endeavour is to rob the Bible of all its divine characteristics; to explain away the wonderful transactions which it records; to account for all its miracles by natural philosophy; and to prove that its doctrine of the supernatural is mere vulgar Jewish error, to which the sacred writers have accommodated their style. If this “philosophy, falsely so called,” is received, the Bible is at once reduced to the level of other books; its doctrines are

unauthenticated; and its divine authority ceases. This German Rationalism, which leads to such fearful consequences, is setting in like a flood; and it behoves every man, who reverences and loves the Bible as the book of God, as the book whose divinity is sealed by the signs and wonders of its almighty Author, to set himself against the tide of evil, and to stand up for the simple integrity of the sacred writings. The writers to whom we allude are infidels, whether avowed or concealed; and, instead of ministering in holy things, and occupying prominent places in the seats of learning, and taking part in the training of candidates for the sacred office, it were an honest thing to cease the profession of Christianity, to throw off the mask, and avow themselves to be, what in truth they are, mere philosophic infidels. Concerning the faith they have lamentably erred; their wisdom and their knowledge have perverted them; they have been spoiled through philosophy and vain deceit; and, in the pride of their intellectualism, they have fallen from the simplicity of the Gospel of Christ. It will be a dark day for true religion in these lands, when the rising ministry shall be familiarized with the writings of these German Rationalists, and trained by the admirers and disciples of this infidel school.

No doubt there are a thousand things which are capable of an easy explanation by the facts and principles of natural science; but the particulars contained in this narrative of Peter's deliverance from prison, are such as

cannot possibly be explained in this way. Take, for example, the falling off of his chains,—the opening of his prison door, without alarming any of the guards, either within the cell or outside of it,—the passage of the iron gate leading into the city, which opened to them of its own accord. An earthquake has been suggested, the agency of lightning has been called in, to effect these wonders. The Christian infidels of whom we are speaking, will lay themselves under obligation to any thing rather than to divine interposition; they will patronize any absurdity, sooner than say, “This is the finger of God.”

Take the sacred account just as it stands, and all is plain, consistent, and beautiful. “Behold, the angel of the Lord came upon him, and a light shined in the prison: and he smote Peter on the side, and raised him up, saying, Arise up quickly. And his chains fell off from his hands.” He “smote” Peter sufficiently to awaken him from his sleep; and, having loosed his fetters, told him to “gird himself,” and “bind on his sandals,” and “cast his garment about him.” In sleeping, the outer garment was thrown off, and the girdle which bound the inner one was loosened, and the sandals were removed from the feet. Peter is now directed to arrange his dress in the usual way for walking; to put on his sandals; to gird up his tunic as it was usually worn; and to put on his outer garment, as in ordinary circumstances. The instructions of the angel to Peter were, in short, simply equivalent

to telling him to dress himself, preparatory to leaving the prison. There appears to have been no particular haste in these preparations; every thing was very deliberately done; and the soldiers, probably under a deep sleep from the Lord, were unconscious of what was taking place.

Jerusalem was surrounded by three walls; and it is supposed that the prison was situated between two of these,—probably between the outer and middle one. By the first and second wards which were passed by Peter and his guide, we are, perhaps, to understand two gates of the prison at which the guards were placed; and by the iron gate leading into the city, one of the gates in the inner wall, which, for greater security and strength, was plated over with iron. This last gate “opened to them of his own accord.” No force was applied, no key was used; it opened at the will of Him “who breaketh the gates of brass, and cutteth in sunder the bars of iron.” (Isai. xlv. 2.)

Peter followed his angelic guide, as it would appear, almost mechanically. The occurrence was so unexpected, so extraordinary and surprising, that for a while he could not comprehend it. “He wist not that it was true which was done by the angel; but thought he saw a vision.” He was overcome with amazement at what had happened, bewildered with the whole of the transactions; and he thought they were the events of a dream, until he found himself standing in one of the streets of Jerusalem. Then it was

he recovered from his surprise. The reality of his deliverance was too plain to be doubted. No chains were upon his hands, no soldiers about him, no prison walls around him; he was in the open air, in a well-known street, and at liberty to go wherever he pleased. "Now," said he, "I know that the Lord hath sent his angel, and hath delivered me out of the hands of Herod, and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews."

The angel conducted Peter out of the prison into the city, and through one street, and then departed from him. What neither Peter could do for himself, nor his friends do for him, the angel did; but, having done this, and placed the Apostle in perfect freedom and safety, so that he no longer needed extraordinary aid, he left him to himself. He could find his own way now to some of his friends: an angel was not required to guide him. In the dealings of God with his people, there is not, so to speak, any unnecessary expenditure of his divine resources. Where ordinary means are sufficient, only ordinary means are employed. What his people are able to do in the usual way, they are expected to do; and then, whatever may be necessary to be done, beyond the limit of their ability, he will accomplish.

Peter now used his own best judgment; and "when he had considered the thing,"—deliberated as to what he had better do under the circumstances,—he recollected "the house of Mary the mother of John, whose surname was Mark," and concluded that he had better make the

best of his way there. It was probably not far off: it was the house of a Christian friend, where he would be gladly received, and where he could remain until further arrangements could be made to insure his safety. No doubt Herod would be greatly exasperated; strict search would be made every where; every available means would be employed to recapture him.

On reaching this house of Mary, Peter “knocked at the door of the gate.” Houses in the East have frequently an area before the door,—a porch, or vestibule; and most likely it was at the door of this latter that Peter knocked. It is to be remembered, that this was during the night, when even ordinarily the gate would be fastened; but still more so now, when persecution was raging. Probably the meeting for prayer which was being held at this moment in the house would be deemed an offence, and expose them to the vexatious procedure of Herod, if it were known: for fear of the Jews, therefore, these persecuted Christians would naturally make all the doors fast, for the greater security. While Peter was knocking, a damsel named Rhoda came to hearken, or rather to ascertain who was there. As soon as she heard Peter speak, she knew his voice; and, as if frantic with gladness, instead of opening the door to him at once, she ran in to tell the company assembled that Peter was safe, and was even now standing at the door. How beautifully natural is this account! Rhoda had been praying with the others for Peter’s release. He had been released,

though as yet they knew it not. Some one knocks at the door ; the damsel goes to ascertain who it is that knocks at this time of night. It is too dark for her to recognise his person ; but, when he speaks, she instantly knows it to be the voice of Peter : the joyful truth breaks suddenly upon her mind ; their prayers were answered, the Apostle is free ; and she is in a moment transported with joy, and hastens into the house to communicate the good news. "She opened not the gate for gladness."

One of the most remarkable things in this account is the incredulity with which the information of Rhoda was received. The persons to whom the information was communicated had been praying earnestly and continuously for the deliverance of Peter. They were engaged in this exercise at the very moment ; but when they are told that their prayer is answered, that the man himself is at the door, they will not believe it, and even charge the person who has brought the news with being mad. What are we to think of this ? Was their prayer, then, but the expression of a forlorn hope ? Did they consider it a thing altogether out of the question that Peter should be delivered ? Did they deem it impossible, and therefore charge the bearer of the intelligence with insanity ? Are we to conclude that, although they prayed for this very thing, they did not pray for it in faith, and consequently were not expecting Peter to be rescued ? We cannot doubt that they prayed in faith. But it might be that their faith was generally in the power and grace of God,

without implying the expectation of a miracle being wrought for Peter's release. And we can easily suppose that, if his release had been effected by other than miraculous means, they might have been gradually prepared for it; the thing would probably have been accomplished by degrees, and not all at once in the dead of the night. But now extraordinary agencies have been at work; the rescue is completed; and at this unusual hour of the night, without the least pre-intimation, it is abruptly announced by a damsel, who seems half frantic with delight, that Peter is at the door. They are surprised and confounded. The news are too good to be true. The strangeness of the event makes them doubt it; and they said to Rhoda, "Thou art mad."

Perhaps there is nothing more in this than what is stated in reference to Israel of old, when they were delivered from their incredible captivity: "When the Lord turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream. Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing." So it was with the disciples when the resurrection of their Lord was announced: "They believed not for joy, and wondered." It is, however, the infirmity of our nature to be unbelievably surprised at the wondrous works of God. Can any mercy be too great for him to bestow upon the needy? Can any work be too mighty for him to accomplish in behalf of those whom he loves? Can any deliverance be too triumphant for his glorious arm to achieve? Why should

we be surprised? The *surprise of delight* we may, indeed, indulge in; but the *surprise of unbelief* is to our discredit.

Some years ago, a Church prayer-meeting was being held in a town in the north of England. Earnest prayers were being offered up for the effusion of the Holy Spirit, and for a revival of the work of God in the town and neighbourhood; and, while they were speaking, he graciously answered. The power of God came down upon the persons present in an unusual manner. Some of them were suddenly awakened to a sense of their sin and danger, and, like the jailor at Philippi, cried aloud, "What must we do to be saved?" The pious people were astonished. The Minister, though seeing, in the effects produced, the gracious power of God put forth in answer to their prayer, scarcely knew what to do, in consequence of the surprise which had been created. It was deemed that some of the persons in distress were taken with a fit of some sort, and that the others were affected merely by sympathy: "it was all purely physical, animal excitement, and the effect of an over-wrought imagination." The very thing they had been praying for was granted; and they did not believe it. It was not until they had thought, conversed, and prayed a while, that they were able to believe that God had visited them with his salvation.

Rhoda persisted in her statement that Peter stood at the gate: in answer to all they said, as to her being mistaken, dreaming, or mad, "she constantly affirmed that it

was even so. Then said they, It is his angel:" just as, in the case alluded to above, they would explain the fact in any way rather than believe the simple truth. It has been observed on this passage, by a living writer, "How much better it would have been to have hastened at once to the gate, than thus to have engaged in a controversy on the subject! Peter was suffered to remain knocking while they debated the matter. Christians are often engaged in some unprofitable controversy, when they should hasten to catch the first tokens of the divine favour, and open their arms to welcome the proofs that God has heard their prayers."

"It is his angel!" Dr. Hammond thinks that the easiest way of understanding this proposed solution of their difficulty, is to consider them as speaking of a "messenger" from Peter,—some one who had come from Peter, and in his name. The word "angel" often signifies no more than a messenger. It is used of John's messengers, (Luke vii. 24, 27,) and of Christ's. (Luke ix. 52.) When Rhoda felt confident it was Peter, because she knew his voice, they thought it was because he that stood at the door had called himself Peter; and therefore offered this solution of the difficulty, "It is his angel;" that is, "It is one that comes with an errand from him, and thou mistookest as if it had been he himself."

Others think that this passage clearly shows the notion entertained by the Jews, of a *tutelary* or *guardian angel* attending each individual saint; and that they supposed

this angel of Peter had now come with news concerning him, and had assumed the voice and form of Peter, to assure them that he had come from him. This is possible; but, even if it be admitted, it gives no support at all to the opinion, that every saint has a tutelary angel attending him. The utmost that can be concluded from the account is, that they believed it to be so, not that it is true. The holy Scriptures teach no such doctrine; and the simple fact that certain Jews held this opinion, cannot, by any means, prove the opinion to be correct.

Peter, having at length obtained admission, found the company in a state of the greatest excitement; and it was with some difficulty that he succeeded in getting them to command themselves sufficiently to listen to his account. "Beckoning unto them with the hand to hold their peace," he "declared unto them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison." Having satisfied their curiosity, and filled them with thankfulness and praise to God on his behalf, he withdrew from them to a place of greater safety. Romanists say, ridiculously enough, that he went to Rome. This is like many other things, which they find easy to say, but impossible to prove.

Diligent search was made, but made in vain, for Peter; and Herod, disappointed and furious, turned his wrath against the keepers of the prison. He examined them, with a view to finding out how the rescue had been effected; but, probably, they could give him no information; and "he commanded that they should be put to

death.” Herod’s own dark day of reckoning was at hand ; and the unprincipled persecutor was made a signal example of the just judgment of God.

The days of persecution for righteousness’ sake are not ended. In our own happy land, indeed, we have rest and liberty ; pray God it may continue to be so, and that we may have grace to improve our advantages ! But there are other lands where religious liberty is denied, where the civil power keeps the conscience of the subject, and it is a punishable crime to preach the Gospel, to meet for prayer, or to possess and read the book of God. Nor are the laws which constitute these things criminal, dead letters. They are enforced. And Christian men and women are now in prison in the Papal States for such offences. The church is one throughout the world. Is it praying for these ? Remember Francesco and Rosa Madiai ! the dungeons of Florence, and the Duke of Tuscany !

SCENE XIII.

THE CLOSING SCENE.

“VERILY, verily, I say unto thee, When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldest: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not. This spake He, signifying by what death he should glorify God.”—John xxi. 18, 19.

“Yea, I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by putting you in remembrance; knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath showed me.”—2 Peter i. 13, 14.

HUMAN life is a journey; and the question is, Where will it end? It is a voyage: what port shall we make? It is our season of probation: how will it terminate? It is a day: when will it close? Who among us is able to answer these inquiries, with respect either to ourselves or to others, and thus to gratify such curiosity as a man may feel in regard to his own future, or such as Peter felt in regard to John, when he said, “Lord, and what shall this man do?” There is none to answer. Every avenue of information is closed; every oracle is dumb; and an impenetrable veil conceals the future from our view. The end itself is, indeed, certain. The sentence has gone forth against us; it cannot be repealed; and “we must

needs die." But, beyond this fact, what can we know? The time, the place, the cause, and the circumstances of our death are all wisely hidden from our sight.

For important reasons, no doubt, although they are not explained to us, it pleased the Redeemer partially to draw aside the curtain, and disclose to his servant Peter the manner of his death. This was done, at an early period of his public career, during a memorable interview with Christ, to which attention has already been directed. An important commission was intrusted to him; the duties of it were specified; and then Peter was solemnly told "by what death he should glorify God." The circumstances connected with the actual fulfilment of these words are involved in considerable obscurity and doubt. There is little that can be affirmed with absolute certainty; and to the questions, "When, and where, and how was the prediction fulfilled?" we can, at the best, give but a probable reply.

The principal difficulty, however, lies with the second of these questions. For, as to the *first*, it is generally admitted that some thirty-four years elapsed between the deliverance of the prediction and its actual accomplishment; and no conclusion of moment depends upon the precise year of Peter's death. And then, with regard to the *third* question, there is a tolerable unanimity of opinion. It is not disputed that Peter suffered martyrdom, and that by the means of crucifixion. Whether he was crucified in the usual posture, or with his head down-

wards at his own request, may have been debated ; but that he was crucified is admitted by both ancient and modern writers.

The words of the prediction have been commonly understood to indicate this particular kind of death. They did not merely certify the fact of Peter's death ; that was, of course, altogether unnecessary. He knew that he must die, without any special revelation to that effect ; but these words were spoken by Christ, "signifying by *what* death he should glorify God." It was the *manner* of his death, and not the *death itself*, to which the prediction pointed ; and, no doubt, the words employed served to convey a definite idea to Peter's mind, whatever difficulty we may have in perceiving *how* they describe the *kind of death* which he should die.

Beside this particular prediction in reference to Peter, our Lord delivered, on another occasion, a comprehensive one with respect to the Apostles and others employed by him in the establishment of his kingdom. "Behold, I send unto you Prophets, and wise men, and scribes : and some of them ye shall kill and crucify ; and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute them from city to city." Christ here tells the Jews, that, among the other crimes by which the measure of their iniquity would be filled up, would be this one of putting to death, crucifying, some of his Apostles. Nicolaus de Lyra, an eminent theologian of the fourteenth century, thus paraphrases the verse : "Some of them you will kill,

as James, and Stephen, and many more ; and others you will crucify, as Peter and Andrew.”

Crucifixion was at once the most ignominious, painful, and lingering mode of putting criminals to death. It was inflicted upon slaves, robbers, assassins, rebels, and the very worst offenders. Previous to undergoing this punishment, the criminal was usually scourged with cords, and not unfrequently pieces of bone or of lead were attached to the ends of the cords ; and the scourging was so severe that many died under it. It was also customary for the condemned person to carry his own cross to the place of execution. Thus lacerated, and writhing with pain, the sufferer was stripped and fastened to the cross, either by spikes driven through the hands into the wood, or else by cords round the wrists and ancles. A hole was dug to receive the foot of the cross, which was then lifted up with the agonized wretch upon it, and allowed to fall suddenly into the hole. This violent jerk must have occasioned the most excruciating pain, by dislocating the joints and tearing the flesh. The whole weight of the body could not be borne up by the fastenings already named ; there was, therefore, about the middle of the perpendicular portion of the cross, a projecting piece of wood, on which the person sat, or, as it were, *rode*, thus giving additional support to the body. “The process of nailing must have been exquisite torture ; but what ensued was worse than the actual infliction. The spikes rankled, the wounds inflamed, the local injury produced a

general fever, the fever a most intolerable thirst; but the misery of miseries to the sufferer was, to be fixed in a position which did not allow him to writhe. Every attempt to relieve the muscles,—every instinctive movement of anguish,—only served to drag the lacerated flesh, and to awake up new and acuter pangs; and this torture must have been continually aggravating, till advancing death lulled it to sleep, lasting, nevertheless, in many sufferers, as long as two or three days.”* And even after the mortal anguish was past, the bodies were often allowed to remain, to be devoured by beasts or birds of prey; or to present the most frightful objects of loathsomeness and putrefaction.

In a work recently published by Mr. T. C. Simon, on “The Mission and Martyrdom of St. Peter,” he endeavours to show, that the *posture of Peter*, while being crucified, is indicated by the words of the prediction. His observations are here given: “In John xxi. 18 and 19, we have our Lord’s prediction, that Peter was to be crucified with his head downwards, in his old age. The manner of the crucifixion we gather from the *girdle*, (or zone,) put on after the person was fastened to the cross by the hands and feet with nails, or by the wrists and ankles with cords. In the ordinary posture of crucifixion, the body was not sustained, (as is commonly supposed,) and could not possibly be sustained, by the fastening of the

* J. Farrar.

hands alone, but was also supported by a seat, or rest, at the middle of the cross, as we learn from Justin Martyr and other early writers. This is well known to divines. When the posture of the body was reversed, it was necessary to adopt a different expedient for supporting its weight. This is the girdle alluded to by our Lord's words, with which the whole body, at the hips, was bound to the cross, and which was put on before the cross was set up in the hole dug for it. That this posture was considered (at least, as late as the Middle Ages) to be implied in our Lord's prediction, may be seen in the work on 'The Destruction of Jerusalem,' which was once erroneously attributed to Hegesippus : 'Peter was crucified' (says this book) 'with his head downwards, at his own request ; either because it was so it was to happen, *as Christ had predicted it*, or because his persecutors willingly granted him an increase of torture.' And, with regard to this mode of crucifying the Christians with the head downwards, Eusebius tells us, in the eighth and twelfth chapters of his Eighth Book, that it was not a very unusual practice in the countries in which the Jews had the ascendancy ; and that on the Euphrates, even a little before his own time, in the districts around Babylon, smoking wood was often placed near the head of the victim thus suspended, in order to aggravate the sufferings, or to accelerate the death."

Such was the tragical termination of an eventful life. This was the goal which Peter had distinctly in view for

upwards of thirty years. His Divine Master had told him plainly that he must suffer in his cause,—suffer in this particular way ; and Peter was content that it should be so. The prospect of suffering neither lessened his affection for Christ, nor abated his zeal in the furtherance of his cause. The path of duty was before him, and he was unappalled by the sight of the cross which stood at the end of it. His step never faltered, never declined from the way. He steadily moved on in the fulfilment of his sacred mission, blessing men with light and salvation, extending the Redeemer's kingdom, and promoting his glory among the nations. His life was one of toil and vicissitude ; but it was cheerfully employed in the service of Him whom he ardently loved. He followed Christ, through evil report and through good report,—followed him to the death. Having run his course, and completed the work Christ had given him to do, he stretches forth his hands, and another girds him to the cross.

But where did this event take place ? Was Peter crucified in the East or in the West ? in Parthia or in Rome ? This is an interesting and somewhat important question, but one which it is extremely difficult, if not altogether impossible, to answer in a satisfactory manner. On the one hand, the New Testament contains nothing direct or conclusive in reference to it ; and there is but confused, scanty, inferential, and traditionary information on the other. We can only, therefore, examine and weigh the evidence adduced, and try to ascertain the side on which

it preponderates. But even this cannot well be done without raising the vexed question, "Did Peter ever visit Rome?" And, considering the amount of learning and ability with which this question has been discussed during the course of centuries, we might well be deterred from any attempt at dealing with it now. But there are a few considerations connected with this question, and lying within the range of the general reader, a brief notice of which may be both acceptable and edifying. The writer's views have not been hastily adopted, or formed without considerable care; but he has felt himself shut up to the conclusion, that St. Peter never left the East, and, consequently, never visited Rome. The reasons which have satisfied the writer, may not satisfy the reader; but they are here, in a comprehensive form, submitted to his judgment.

Although it be true, as already intimated, that the sacred writings furnish no direct or decisive information, we are not, therefore, hastily to conclude that their evidence is unimportant. Indirect it may be, but it will be found to have considerable force. There are several facts which, though they have no immediate connexion with the history of St. Peter, may nevertheless imply very much concerning him. There is no inconsiderable amount of negative proof, which, fairly taken, may go far to settle the dispute; and especially as it appears that the writings of the Christian Fathers do not contain such plain and unequivocal statements of Peter's having visited or lived in

Rome, as many have supposed. Certain expressions are used by them,—certain allusions are made to Peter and to his martyrdom, to the extent and the success of his apostolic labours,—from which inferences are drawn, and upon which arguments more or less plausible are founded; but nothing like a simple, *bonâ fide* assertion that St. Peter ever dwelt in the imperial city, can be produced. Leaving this, however, for the present, let us confine our attention to the books of the New Testament; a single clear intimation of which is entitled to far greater consideration than all that the Fathers contain.

It is to be observed here, that there are several years of St. Peter's life with respect to which the Scriptures are silent. From the time when he was present at the Council held at Jerusalem in the year 49 or 51, till his death, which is generally supposed to have taken place about the year 64 or 65, there are some fifteen years of which we have no account by the sacred writers. They neither tell us where Peter was, nor what he was doing, during all those years. The narrative is taken up chiefly with the labours and journeyings of St. Paul. It is, however, tolerably certain that St. Peter had not left the East previous to the Jerusalem Council. His first alleged visit to Rome, prior to that date, is now generally abandoned; and we will therefore assume, that the inquiry as to the probable scene of his labours relates to the years subsequent to that event.

What is there, then, to guide us in this inquiry?

Have we any clue to where St. Peter exercised his ministry and apostleship? We think we have.

In the first place, there is the fact that *St. Peter was the Apostle of the circumcision*. When the twelve Apostles were originally sent forth, they were carefully instructed to confine their ministry to the Jews. Jesus “commanded them, saying, Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” This commission was renewed, immediately before the Saviour’s ascension, in an extended form, so as to include the Gentiles; but even then it contained a clause in favour of the Jews, a clause which gave them a primary interest in the ministry of the twelve. The Gospel was to be preached in all the world,—repentance and the remission of sins were to be offered, in the name of Christ, among all nations, “beginning at Jerusalem.” And St. Paul, arguing from this very arrangement, says, “It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles.” (Acts xiii. 46.)

It is true that St. Peter had the honour of opening the Gospel dispensation to the Gentiles, by preaching to a Gentile congregation assembled in the house of Cornelius at Cæsarea, and composed of the kinsmen and near friends of this Roman Captain. But though it had pleased God that the Gentiles should thus, by the mouth of Peter, hear

the word of the Gospel and believe, still his mission was specifically to the Jews: his work, as an Apostle of Jesus Christ, was chiefly among "the lost sheep of the house of Israel." This is clearly and strongly affirmed, as we think, in the statement of St. Paul in his Epistle to the Galatians: "When they saw that the Gospel of the uncircumcision was committed unto me, as the Gospel of the circumcision was unto Peter; (for he that wrought effectually in Peter to the apostleship of the circumcision, the same was mighty in me toward the Gentiles;) they gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship; that we should go unto the Heathen, and they unto the circumcision." Now, while we are not to understand from this that St. Paul was to preach *only* to the Gentiles, and St. Peter *only to the Jews*, we are nevertheless bound to assume that the principal part of the labours of each would be with the Jew and the Gentile respectively. There was a clear understanding come to on this point: it was agreed that St. Paul should exercise his ministry among the Gentiles, and that St. Peter should exercise his among the Jews. Peter need not, in consequence of this, confine his labours to Judea; but we think it reasonable to conclude that, when at any time he travelled beyond the limits of his own country, it would only be to those parts which contained a considerable Jewish population.

Every thing seems to intimate that Peter faithfully fulfilled the duties of his commission, that he made full proof of his apostleship among them that were of the circum-

cision. This, indeed, may be gathered from his Epistles. They were addressed to the "strangers scattered abroad throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia." Now, although the phrase, "strangers scattered abroad," may be applied to all truly pious people, (for all the saints of God "are strangers and pilgrims, seeking a better country, that is, an heavenly,") yet we cannot but think that here it has a distinct reference to "the lost sheep of the house of Israel," the Jews of the dispersion, the Jews who had been driven from their own country by persecution, and compelled to seek refuge in those heathen provinces to which the influence of their persecuting brethren did not extend. To these, therefore, the Apostle of the circumcision gave his special attention and sympathy. And although we may very well suppose that in those places there were many of St. Paul's converts, it is not at all an improbable conjecture that St. Peter had also lived and laboured among them for a season. They were Gentile provinces, it is true, but comprising large numbers of Jews, and therefore forming an appropriate sphere both for Peter and Paul.

It is not consistent with the speciality of St. Peter's apostleship that he should have gone to labour either in Rome or in any other Gentile city, except on the one condition, that it contained a considerable number of Jews. Now, with respect to Rome, it can be clearly shown that the number of Jews resident there was inconsiderable, and that, very shortly before the time when it is said Peter

went to Rome, the Jews had been banished both from the imperial city and from Italy. What business, therefore, could Peter have in Rome? "The lost sheep of the house of Israel" were not there for him to gather. The capital of the world was the place for St. Paul, and not for St. Peter.

If it be said that Peter laboured in Corinth, it will not weaken our position. It is by no means certain that he did so. It has been inferred from one or two passages in St. Paul's Epistles to the Corinthians; and possibly the inference is legitimate. But it is to be observed that the population of this celebrated city was by no means exclusively a Gentile one, and that even there St. Peter had not travelled beyond the appointed sphere of his apostleship. Nor would he have done so, if he had gone to Alexandria, which contained about a million of Jews; or to Babylon, in which there were perhaps two hundred and fifty thousand; or to the province of Babylonia, containing upwards of two millions of Jews. Places such as these, and the others named in his First Epistle, formed the appropriate sphere for the Apostle of the circumcision. On the whole, therefore, we have a strong presumptive argument in favour of Peter having lived and laboured in the East, and against his having gone into the West. The persons upon whom he was to exercise his ministry were located in the former, and not in the latter.

In the second place, we find that *the Epistles of St. Peter were written from Babylon*. It is probable that the

First Epistle was written about the year 60, and the Second not very long after it. At the close of the First we find these words: "The church that is at Babylon, elected together with you, saluteth you; and so doth Marcus my son." No one doubts that, at the time of writing this Epistle, Peter was residing in the place called Babylon. And if there had not been a purpose to answer,—a particular theory to maintain,—it is scarcely likely that a controversy would ever have been raised, as to what city the Apostle meant by "Babylon." The supposition that the name is mystically employed, is wholly gratuitous. There is not a tittle of evidence in support of it; and it is altogether inconsistent with the character of the document in which the name occurs. It is impossible to conceive that, in any one of the churches to whom the Epistle was addressed, persons, on receiving it, and finding it dated from Babylon, could have the most distant idea that the writer meant by "Babylon," Jerusalem, Rome, or some other place. All the arguments in favour of a mystical interpretation of the word "Babylon," have been triumphantly answered, especially by Michaëlis, who thus concludes his observations: "It appears, then, that the arguments which have been alleged to show that St. Peter did not write his First Epistle in the country of Babylonia, are devoid of foundation; and, consequently, the notion of a mystical Babylon, as denoting either Jerusalem or Rome, loses its whole support. For in itself the notion is highly improbable; and therefore the

bare possibility that St. Peter took a journey to Babylon, properly so called, renders it inadmissible. The plain language of epistolary writing does not admit of the figures of poetry; and, though it would be very allowable, in a poem written in honour of Göttingen, to style it 'another Athens,' yet if a Professor in this University should, in a letter written from Göttingen, date it 'Athens,' it would be a greater piece of pedantry than ever was laid to the charge of the learned. In like manner, though a figurative use of the word 'Babylon' is not unsuited to the animated and poetical language of the Apocalypse, yet St. Peter, in a plain and unadorned Epistle, would hardly have called the place where he wrote by any other appellation than that which literally and properly belonged to it."

Some writers, while admitting that "Babylon" is to be taken literally, and not mystically, are nevertheless of opinion, that we are not to understand the Ancient Babylon on the Euphrates, but Seleucia, or Modern Babylon, on the Tigris. This latter city was built by Seleucus Nicator, at the distance of three hundred *stadia*, or about forty miles, from Ancient Babylon. To this city a great many Jews repaired; and at one time, as Josephus informs us, the number of Jews in Seleucia was so great, that although nearly fifty thousand of them were slaughtered in the factious quarrels of the Syrians and Greeks, yet such of them as escaped were able, with such other Jews of Babylonia as had rendered themselves obnoxious, to hold out the strong

cities of Neerda and Nisibis against the united force of those Seleucians and Babylonians that were opposed to them. This city of Seleucia, it is alleged, was sometimes called "Modern Babylon;" and it is supposed by certain writers that it was from it St. Peter wrote his Epistles. "It is true," says Michaëlis, "that Lucan, Sidonius Apollinaris, and Stephanas Byzantinus, gave the name of Babylon to Seleucia; but the last two of these writers lived so late as the fifth century, and therefore their authority is, perhaps, not sufficient that Seleucia was called Babylon in the first century. Lucan, indeed, was a contemporary with St. Peter; but then he uses this word in an epic poem, in which a writer is not bound by the same rule as in prose: and it is not improbable that he selected the word 'Babylon,' because, partly, its celebrity added pomp to his diction, and, partly, because neither Ctesiphon nor Seleucia would have suited the verse. The writer of an Epistle, on the contrary, can allow himself no such latitude; and perspicuity requires that, in the date of his Epistle, he should use no other name for the town where he writes, than that which properly belongs to it. If, therefore, St. Peter had really written at Seleucia, he would have hardly called this city by the name of 'Babylon,' though this name was sometimes applied to it; consequently, it is most probable that St. Peter wrote his First Epistle in Ancient Babylon on the Euphrates."

How strange it is to see men giving themselves so much unnecessary trouble to explain a thing which unlettered

people find no difficulty in at all ! Any plain reader of the Holy Scriptures would have understood at once that St. Peter meant Babylon, when he wrote the word ; and no other city would be thought of but the ancient capital of Chaldea. Perhaps, however, Seleucia, or Modern Babylon, was thought of by the learned, under an impression that the ancient city was extinct in the days of St. Peter, or, at any rate, so much reduced as to make it highly improbable that he should have laboured in it as an Apostle. An opinion of this sort has certainly been entertained ; but it is difficult to account for it, as nothing can be more incorrect. It can be demonstrated by numerous testimonies of credible historians, that, although greatly reduced from its former peerless magnificence, it was still, in the Apostle's time, a city of considerable importance, and reckoned the metropolis of the Jews out of Judea ; and, as we shall presently show, was one of the most likely spheres for St. Peter's ministry.

Josephus, in speaking of the return of the Jews from Babylon in the time of Ezra, gives us to understand, that the great bulk of the people did not return to Jerusalem, but remained in Babylon. His words are, "The entire body of the people of Israel remained in that country ; wherefore there are but two tribes in Asia and Europe subject to the Romans, while the ten tribes are beyond the Euphrates until now, and are an immense multitude, and not to be estimated by numbers." According to this testimony of a writer contemporary with St. Peter, there

were innumerable multitudes of Jews in Babylonia in his time, the descendants of the Jews of the Captivity. Besides, there were many others who were attracted to this province by the two famous seats of Jewish learning, Neharda and Susa; and a still larger number were driven here by persecution from their bigoted countrymen in Judea.

Philo, another Jew, and also contemporary with St. Peter, says, that the Jews at Babylon appeared to constitute about one-half of the inhabitants; and, in another place, this writer speaks of them as the chief occupants of Babylon and its neighbourhood, and as being so numerous, that Petronius, the Syrian Prefect, was deterred by their numbers from withdrawing, as Caligula had ordered him, one-half of the Roman forces from the Euphrates to Judea, to insist on the Emperor's statue being placed in the temple at Jerusalem.

In the work to which reference has already been made, the author adduces numerous authorities as to the state of Babylon in the days of St. Peter, and clearly establishes the following points: That Babylon was then the same peculiarly-constructed city as ever, consisting, as from its first foundation, of an enclosed area of about two hundred square miles, of which the greater part was, as it always had been, laid out in pasture, tillage, and plantations, little more than a twentieth of the whole being occupied with the dwellings of the inhabitants, and these, for the most part, detached from one another; that it was then

within the Parthian territory ; that it was used as a country residence by the Kings of Parthia, one of its palaces being not only kept in repair, but handsomely decorated ; that its population was not much less than half a million, and that half of these were Jews ; that, though not adapted for military purposes, the Kings of Parthia kept a garrison there ; and that, even half a century after Peter's time, when the Emperor Trajan went there, he was obliged to take it by force of arms, as Dio Cassius and Eutropius inform us, and placed a Roman garrison in it in order to retain it. Theodoret, (A.D. 459,) one of the Bishops on the Euphrates, remarks, in his "Commentary on the Thirteenth Chapter of Isaiah," that Babylon, in his day, was wholly occupied by Jews ; and St. Chrysostom reminds us that there were Jews from Babylon, among those Parthians who were at Jerusalem when St. Peter commenced his foundation of the churches, at the Feast of Pentecost, immediately after the Ascension. (Acts ii. 9.)

On the whole, therefore, it is plain that the province of Babylonia contained the largest number of Jews to be found any where out of Judea ; that the ancient city was still a place of considerable importance ; that it contained some two hundred and fifty thousand of "the lost sheep of the house of Israel ;" that the Babylonians were, as Joseph Scaliger says, the head of the Asiatic dispersion, as is clear from innumerable passages of the Talmud ; and that such a Jewish colony, with its origin, historical associations, influence, and central position, had special claims

upon apostolic sympathy and care, and must have presented the most attractive and peculiarly appropriate sphere for the labours of the Apostle of the circumcision. And, as the only indication we have of Peter's residence, during the fifteen years subsequent to the Council at Jerusalem, represents him as writing letters from this very place to the churches in the provinces immediately contiguous, as living here, and, by his Epistles, serving the surrounding churches, the presumptive evidence is strong indeed that this region had been the principal scene of his labours and successes.

And now it is to be observed, that the Second of these Epistles, which was written to the same persons, was evidently composed but a short time before his decease. He thus speaks in it: "Yea, I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by putting you in remembrance; knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath showed me." It is not unlikely, that, in addition to the prediction recorded by John, St. Peter had received a further intimation of his approaching martyrdom; at any rate, his language implies that he believed that event to be at hand. And with such an impression on his mind, there is no probability in the supposition, that he undertook so distant a journey as that to the imperial city. He felt, when he wrote this Second Epistle, that he had finished his Master's work, and only desired to leave one other legacy to the church. He was preparing to render

up his account, and only waited to be summoned hence.

In pursuing our examination of the presumptive evidence of New-Testament writings, in relation to the question we are now considering, we remark once more, that St. Paul, though visiting Rome, and residing in it, at one time, for two years, and writing several of his Epistles from it, *never once alludes to St. Peter having been in that city*. The Epistle to the Romans was written in the year 58; it does not contain the most distant reference to Peter. And this is the more remarkable, as “St. Paul is profuse in salutations, occupies a whole chapter in nothing else, and salutes a multitude of persons employed in the church. If we should say St. Peter was absent, we cannot escape the difficulty; for not only does Paul abstain from saluting Peter, but he writes positively to this flock as to a flock which had never yet seen an Apostle. ‘I am ready,’ he says, ‘to preach the Gospel to you that are at Rome also;’ that is, to preach the Gospel to the Christians of Rome,—the flock of another, and that other the Prince of Apostles, established as their Bishop for some years! It is well known that St. Paul preferred to preach the Gospel where no other Apostle had preceded him; and, nevertheless, he sends to the Christians of this city exhortation and rules; he desires to communicate to them some spiritual gift; he praises them, he instructs them, he encourages them by name; and yet, in all this, not one word can be found which can be con-

strued into a reference to any residence, present or past, of St. Peter in this city. What would any Bishop say to a Priest, or even to a colleague, who should write in this manner to a flock over which he had presided for years? Doubtless, if such an one should come to his assistance, with the respect due from one colleague to another, he would receive him with gratitude ; but if, on the contrary, he should make no mention whatever of the Bishop, reprove, instruct, correct his flock, as though he were not in existence, he might be naturally led to inquire who he was, and to advise him to abstain from meddling with the duties of others. St. Paul salutes, in this flock, five distinct classes of those who, it is asserted, were under the special charge of St. Peter, and, by name, twenty-six different persons, several of whom he designates as his helpers in Christ : and not a word of St. Peter.” *

St. Paul arrived in Rome in the year 61 or 62, and dwelt there for two years. Immediately after his arrival, he called together the chief of the Jews, and informed them of the cause of his coming to Rome. They answered, “ We neither received letters out of Judea concerning thee, neither any of the brethren that came showed or spake any harm of thee. But we desire to hear of thee what thou thinkest : for as concerning this sect, we know that every where it is spoken against.” Nothing can be plainer than that St. Peter neither was in Rome at that

* Dr. Scheler.

time, nor had ever been among these people. During this residence of two years at Rome, St. Paul wrote his Epistles to the Philippians, to the Colossians, to the Ephesians, to Philemon, and, as is supposed, to the Hebrews: in none of them does he mention Peter. And it might very well be argued from the clear view which these Epistles give us of the condition of the Roman church, that its members had never had the benefit of St. Peter's ministry.

The last Epistle written by St. Paul was the Second to Timothy. When he wrote it, he was "ready to be offered up, and the time of his departure was at hand;" and he urgently requests Timothy to visit him: "Do thy diligence to come shortly unto me: for Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica; Crescens to Galatia, Titus unto Dalmatia. *Only* Luke is with me. Take Mark, and bring him with thee: for he is profitable to me for the ministry. At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me: I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge. Eubulus greeteth thee, and Pudens, and Linus, and Claudia, and all the brethren." Now it is impossible to believe that St. Peter was in Rome at the time when St. Paul wrote this letter. And we cannot believe that he was in Rome when St. Paul appeared before Nero on the former occasion, without implying the greatest reflection on Peter, for unfeeling and cowardly conduct, in abandoning St. Paul in the hour of his trial and peril.

“There are six times in which St. Paul was either at Rome, or wrote to and from that city, for the edification of the churches. In one year he wrote thrice from thence. At another time he remained two full years preaching in his own hired house; including, on the whole, a period of not less than thirteen or fourteen years. The Apostle gives no account that Peter was expected there subsequent to any of his visits, or that he was there previous to his arrival, or during his stay. Yet St. Paul governed the affairs of the church at Rome, gave directions for their conduct, and mentioned by name, in his salutations, all the principal Christians in the city, whether men or women. Still he says not one word about Peter, who, according to the Romanists, had his throne there, and governed the church, previous to Paul’s arrival, during his residence, and after his departure. Certainly, if Peter had been at Rome, some mention would have been made of it by Paul. Indeed, there is no evidence that Peter ever was in that city.” *

From this brief outline, it will be seen that the New Testament furnishes a strong presumption that the Apostle of the circumcision never left the East, but continued, till the day of his death, exercising his ministry among his own countrymen, and gathering “the lost sheep of the house of Israel” into the fold of Christ. If this negative proof be duly considered, it can hardly fail to bring us to the conclusion which Dr. Adam Clarke thus expresses :

* Elliott.

“I am still of opinion that St. Peter did not write from Rome; that he was neither Bishop of Rome, nor martyred at Rome; in a word, that he never saw Rome.”

And now, as to the writings of the Fathers of the Christian church in relation to this matter, pray, what do they amount to? There is nothing contained in them but what is either uncertain as to its authorship, inferential in its character, or most vaguely traditionary. We will venture to affirm, that the whole of what has at any time been adduced from these writings, in support of the notion that St. Peter lived and laboured and suffered in Rome, does not amount to half so strong a presumption that he did so, as the New Testament supplies that he did not. It so happens, too, that some of the testimonies on which the upholders of Peter's labours and martyrdom at Rome have most confidently relied, are demonstrably spurious, or incorrectly quoted, or falsely construed. Several of them were not written by the persons to whom they have been ascribed; as in the instance of Hegesippus, who lived in the second century, and was alleged to have written a little work on “The Destruction of Jerusalem,” but which was a production of the Middle Ages; or in that of Lactantius, who lived in the fourth century, and to whom was attributed the authorship of a Tract “On the Deaths of the Persecutors,” but which was in reality written in the seventeenth century. Both of these works contained something in favour of Peter's having been in Rome; but, unfortunately, they are spurious.

As an example of *fictitious* reference to the Fathers, we cite the following from Dr. Wiseman's "Lectures on the Doctrines of the Catholic Church," with the remarks of Faber, in his work on Transubstantiation: "After observing that, among the moderns, no ecclesiastical writer of any eminence pretends to deny the fact, that *Peter was the first Bishop of Rome*, the Lecturer, in evidence of the fact, cites Irenæus as speaking in the terms following: 'To Peter, succeeded Linus; to Linus, Anacletus; then, in the third place, Clement.' ('IREN. *Adv. Hæres.*, lib. iii., cap. 3.')

I have carefully given the citation, with its appended reference, precisely as both are given by Dr. Wiseman; and I readily admit, that the passage, *purporting* to be cited from the oldest author who details the foundation of the Roman Church, and the succession of her early Bishops down to Eleutherius, the twelfth, clearly and distinctly propounds Peter to have been the first Bishop of this Church, and Linus to have been his immediate successor. *This* I readily admit; and no thanks to me, for the adduced passage is imperative; but, unluckily for Dr. Wiseman's cited testimony, *no such passage occurs, either in the place referred to, or, I will venture to say, in any other place of the work of Irenæus.* The account which that very ancient Father *really* gives of the matter, differs *toto cœlo* from that which, through the medium of a *non-occurring citation*, is gravely ascribed to him by Dr. Wiseman."

Eusebius is often referred to, as giving the sanction of

his authority to the opinion of Peter's martyrdom at Rome. We ask, Is there any thing in Eusebius beyond a mere conjecture, that, as Peter's relics had been found at Rome in the fourth century, when Constantine was there, the Apostle might have suffered at Rome, and not at Babylon, as the Second Epistle of Peter intimates? His words are, "It is not improbable that during the time Peter was proclaiming the Gospel to the Jews of the Dispersion, he may have resided in Pontus, and Galatia, and Bithynia, in Cappadocia, and Asia, and even that he may have been finally at Rome, where he was crucified with his head downwards, he having himself also considered that it was in this posture he was to die." Does Eusebius give us any thing stronger than this in relation to Peter's having been at Rome? Does he quote any evidence that is not strictly inferential? In fact, all the proof adduced either from him or others consists of allusions to the writings, labours, martyrdom, and relics of St. Peter, from which certain inferences are drawn.

If it be urged as a thing universally admitted, that St. Peter suffered martyrdom under Nero, the answer is, That determines nothing *as to the place* of such martyrdom; as it can be shown that Nero's persecutions extended to the various provinces subject to the Roman empire, and that multitudes were put to death, at his instigation, hundreds of miles from Rome.

We cannot now pursue this inquiry further; but the general view which we have given of the *character* of the

evidence to be found in the Fathers, might readily be supported by particular references to the sixteen Latin and eleven Greek writers cited by Cardinal Baronius. So that, although Greswell (a name not to be mentioned but with profound respect) has said, that "the truth of the general proposition that both St. Paul and St. Peter suffered martyrdom at Rome, and under the reign of Nero, is so well authenticated, and by such a cloud of witnesses, that it would be the height of scepticism to disbelieve it, and an unnecessary waste of trouble to produce the testimonies to it,"—we must still take the liberty of maintaining, that those testimonies are any thing but satisfactory and conclusive, and that the balance of evidence is in favour of St. Peter never having been in Rome.

We have now followed Peter through some of the most interesting and important scenes of his life, and to the ignominious and painful death by which he glorified God. We have attempted to delineate his character and explain his conduct, and to point out the lessons of instruction which they convey. We have seen some things in Peter to disapprove of and lament; but we have seen more to commend and to admire. Bold, ardent, and impulsive, he was not always prudent and judicious either in his sayings or doings. His judgment was occasionally borne down by the impetuous tide of his feelings; but he was, nevertheless, one of the most sincerely attached disciples of Christ, one of the most honoured of his friends, and one of the most zealous and successful of all his Apostles.

During a long course of active service, he widely spread the Gospel of the grace of God among men, was the instrument of converting thousands to the faith of the Lord Jesus, and honoured as the founder of numerous churches in different regions. His consecrated life was terminated by a cruel death; but even that was made subservient to what had been the great object of his life,—the glory of God. His apostolical labours came to an end amidst the suffering and the shame of the cross; but they were rewarded with a martyr's crown. To use his own favourite expression, he “put off his tabernacle;” and “an entrance was ministered unto him abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.”

Peter's duty was all summed up in following Christ: so is ours. Peter's great end was to “glorify God:” this, also, is ours. While, therefore, we contemplate his example, let us ask ourselves the question, “Are we fulfilling our duty, and promoting the great end of our being,—the glory of God?” The work that cannot be done while following Christ, ought not to be done at all: it is no part of our duty. And the aim which is limited to earth and time is paltry compared with this, and is, in fact, unworthy of our resources, and of the loftiness of our immortal powers. The material universe, with all its planets, suns, and systems, was made to mirror forth the glory of the Deity; and the highest intelligences in earth or heaven can do no more than “glorify God.” All the

powers of our being—mental, moral, and physical—may be happily consecrated to this chief end; all our worldly possessions, and all the engagements of our every-day life, may be used as instruments of bringing glory to God. So says St. Paul: “Ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s;” and, “Whether therefore ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.” O that we might reach this high style of Christian excellence!

The means and opportunities for advancing the divine glory, no doubt, greatly vary in degree. Talents are not equally distributed. To one are given five, to another two, and to another one. An obscure position is occupied by this man, and a more prominent one by that; an extensive sphere of influence is marked out for one person, while very narrow limits are assigned to another. The King has distributed to every man according to his several ability; but to all He says, “Occupy till I come.”

Instead, therefore, of foolishly desiring the sphere and gifts of others, we should devoutly fill up and employ our own, in the assured confidence that, in the providence of God, we are favourably situated, on the whole, for accomplishing the chief end of our being,—the glory of God, and the enjoyment of him for ever. If the Divine Master should have some more public or influential place for you than the one which you at present fill, you may be sure that he will open your way to it; but in the mean time, “in the calling wherein you have been called, therein abide;” and while

you are adorning the doctrine of God your Saviour in all things, those around you will be led to glorify your Father which is in heaven.

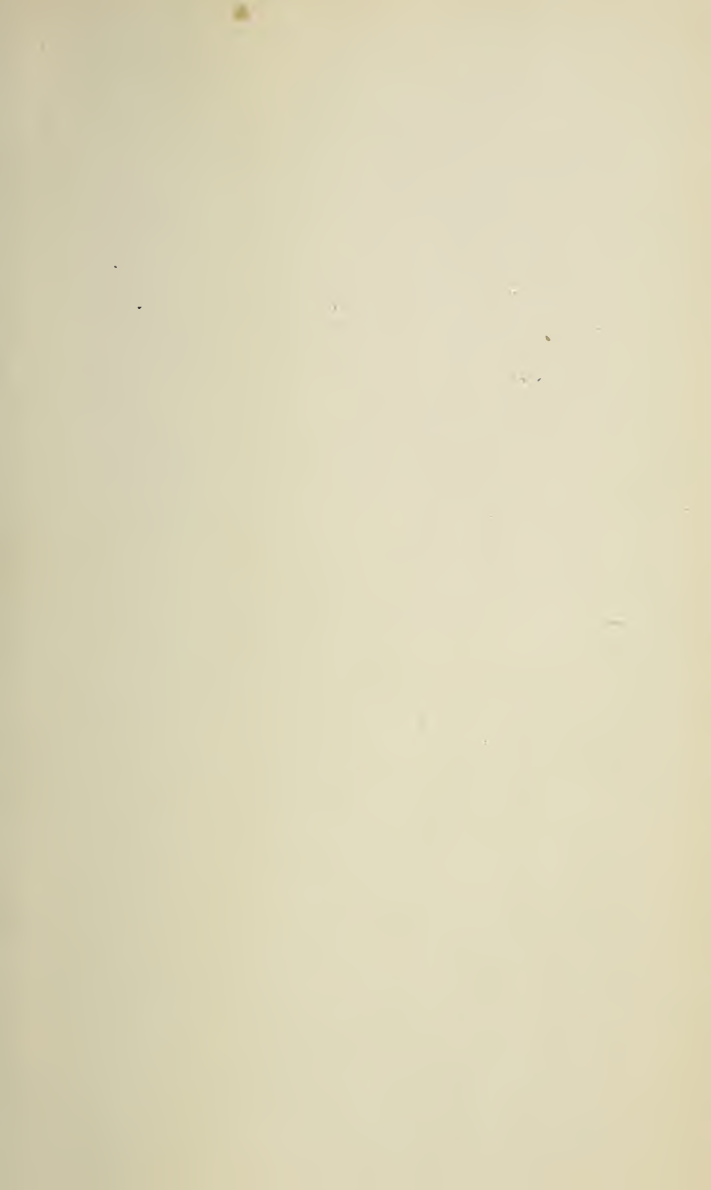
We are instructed, by what is here said concerning the death of Peter, that it is not only by doing, but also by suffering, the will of God, that we may bring glory to him. When, in the midst of difficulty, and trial, and pain, the soul is possessed in patience, and no murmurings are heard, and no rebellion is manifested; when, though surrounded with turmoil, and at the same time enduring strong pain, the peace which passeth all understanding keeps the heart and mind; when “deep calleth unto deep,” and the only response from the sanctified soul, as the waves go over it, is, “It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good;” then, indeed, is the truth, and the power, and the blessedness of religion witnessed, and God the Author is abundantly glorified.

“Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints,” under whatever circumstances it takes place. Whether, calmly reposing in his truth and love, the saved one falls asleep in Jesus; or whether faith attains its loftiest triumph, and the Christian hero sings, “O grave, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting?” whether they die like Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!” or whether they take up the language of David, “Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for Thou art with me; and thy rod and thy staff they comfort

me:”—in any case, the divinity of our holy religion is demonstrated, and faith is found unto praise and honour and glory.

“Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his!” That it may be so, we must follow Christ. And then, whensoever the end may come, in whatever place death may overtake me, under whatsoever guise he may present himself, and howsoever he may be accompanied, I need not be anxious; all will be well. Light and grace will be afforded me. While earth recedes from my view, heaven will open upon it. While the clamours of earth are hushing into eternal silence, the music of heaven will be breaking in. While loved friends are fast disappearing, angels and the spirits of just men made perfect will be coming into sight. My last look on earth will be instantly followed by my first glance through the skies; and the last sigh or groan of mortality will be succeeded by the first note of the song of Moses and the Lamb in the paradise of God. And thus, having done and suffered the divine will, I shall, in death as in life, GLORIFY GOD.

THE END.



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